

New Neuroses, Old Love

Research Thesis

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by

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Why we let our ducks drive

Last December I took a young woman to a French restaurant in midtown where we spent a splendid afternoon eating fingerling potatoes and talking about my mother. When the waiter arrived, I motioned to her empty glass, watched it fill neatly to the end of the bell, and said something about cul-de-sacs and the rest of our lives. She smiled, nodded thanks to the waiter, and reached for her coat, saying: 'just a minute'. Moments later, I looked out the window to catch a glimpse of her, struggling with the arms of her coat as she sprinted round the corner of 26th and Park.

Perhaps it's because of these sorts of afternoons that I was surprised, months later, at having managed to speak to a woman during a concert in a warehouse basement. We had the sort of conversation I'd heard about other men having with women, either through an anecdote told to me by a friend or in passing between a couple reminiscing in conversation. Those ones where nothing said is remembered and things just happen from there, two people meet somewhere and talk for a while and then they're together and when you ask things like, "what'd you talk about" or "how do I do it", they just say "it was Love and that's all. We just danced—I would lower my hand and she would raise it." I've heard people say that. I remember thinking they thought that was what it was, even though it couldn't have been—that there must have been something more. And so when I tell you I don't know what we'd done, that there wasn't more to say than "sometimes two people meet", I'm sorry, because I'd want to know too. We talked, and I asked her to dinner.

We scheduled a date, at her place. I was told to bring nothing so I brought wine. When I arrived I recognized her, it surprised me that I didn't assume I would. I'd actively replayed the scenario in my head: exchanging a polite hug and then retreating to the restroom, opening the bathroom window (all daydream bathrooms have windows), and leaving. To my surprise she was beautiful, with a smile that caught even sober eyes. Why she let me in the front door, how I could have said anything in the thirty minutes we'd spoken, one cannot know. I wore my duck socks, she giggled when I took my shoes off.

It occurred to me that she was an adult. An adult had decorated the house. And then fear came, knowing that I might have the chance to see an adult's breasts, something I had assume would follow logically by being alive long enough, but never actually understood on a deeper, cognitive, emotional level. Looking around her living room, at times I was brought back to my childhood, reminded by a certain album or film or book. At other times, in the dining room and kitchen both, I found rooms I'd hoped to live in but didn't, with posters of my favorite musicians and comedians on each wall.

I remember one portrait in particular, of Andy Kaufman, a poster I'd seen before. I'd been at a corner store where I nearly bought it, but instead spent the money on a chocolate bar after I noticed another man who'd just wrapped it under his arm call the cashier 'faggot' and skip out of the place.

She told me she replaced the wooden floorboards with her own, and added a beautiful finish that I would describe exquisitely and in informed particulars if I

were a man, but I am not and know nothing of wood. The wood looked nice.

Her dog licked my shins. It jumped up onto my lap and then gnawed on my bangs. One learns to be accommodating, one must, though a dog had never before lapped up my hair. It must have been what I've heard people call a *moment*. She stared at the ends of my hair, watched them split, moisten, and darken in the mouth of the beast. She could focus—I noticed this then and for the first time. If I had made a single move in protest, I was sure, I would never make it upstairs. I nearly said, "I love you," but did not.

She threw a tennis ball and the dog chased it. After her focus weaned I remembered I didn't love her, though I could still remember what it felt like to.

She brought over a chocolate mousse.

"It's made with avocados. Could you tell it's vegan?" she said.

I could, one always can. She fed me a spoonful before I could answer and took my hand and moved me towards the stairs. The notes of burning candles and ginger that smelled pleasantly vague from the kitchen turned combative as we climbed, striking with an incalculable quickness common to daytime robbery. We reached the top of the stairs.

"I hope you don't mind," she said.

"Of course not," is what I have said to this question my entire life. I cannot recall a single instance where I haven't replied 'of course not' to this question. If it were a question, there would be a multitude of answers which psychologists would

have analyzed and published in various works, available both online and in journals around the country. But it isn't a question—it's a demand, a phrase which can *only* mean: "This is a part of me, and if you'd like to be with me, date me, marry me, if you would ever like to lay in bed beside me, it's a quality that you'll accept."

Inside, along with the candles that I'd assumed would and did line the windows and bed, was a crib. I hadn't heard the cry of a baby, I was certain, (being wary of the sound of a crying baby in a house one is visiting for the first time is a lesson one either is forced to learn or does not learn at all) and so when she lifted the cover off of the crib and nothing wailed, I felt relieved. There was no mobile to be found, no chewed plastics. There was no scent of diaper, of wipes, of powder, not even a shadow of a crawling infant sprawled on a faux-bearskin rug.

Then I looked up at her and saw it on her eyes, wearing moisture like devotion, Love like she might cry. And I took back everything I'd thought. Not all babies, I supposed, have a mobile. She reached into the crib, damn near nestled down into it, and held it up in front of me. A duck. A mallard. Two feet tall, white feathered with yellow bill, there did not exist a more duck-like-duck than this particular duck.

"He eats strawberries and lettuce," she said.

She put him down on the floor, said it like I'd asked, though it is possible that I did and have forgotten.

Years later when I'm lying on a brown button-perforated sofa at the feet of a

psychiatrist, I will remember having saved the memory of her face at that moment as I tell him—that I'd never felt more aroused than at that very moment, never in my life. I felt compelled, in a way so sincerely barbaric that charges would have been rightly pressed had I been moved to action, to throw her onto the bed in front of the animal company I was certain I'd never again have, and make love to her.

“That’s a good duck,” I said.

I said that instead.

I almost fell down to pet the thing, and before I could reach out my hand she stopped me.

“Don’t,” she said. “Ever since the surgery he hasn’t been the same.”

There’s a certain point that things can come to when one is wrapped so tightly, where sighs become indistinguishable from laughs, routine hallway pleasantries like “hey how are you” seem enigmas to be solved. Producing a response becomes so futile an effort that, rather than respond, one might as well spend their time roasting flies by magnifying glass on the concrete heat of a neighbor’s blacktop driveway while shouting profanities at passersby. One is forced to think less or more of nothing.

“He was in a car accident. Drunk driving,” she said.

“That’s a shame,” I said.

I’m certain this is what I said, without question. Another instance of tragedy

by drunk driving, added to the list of the others.

“He couldn’t see the road because he’s a duck,” she said. And then she picked up the duck with one hand and took mine in the other. She paused. She touched her nose to the duck’s nape.

“Why do we let our ducks drive?” she said.

She put him onto the floor. The dog entered the bedroom and fell to his back and his legs sprung into the air, beckoning the duck.

“How much did he have?” I said.

“Three slices of Wonder Bread soaked in Maker’s,” she said.

I looked at her.

“College kids, you know,” she said. And I felt I did.

She told me to lie on the bed. Between quacks and snorts I made out her whispers: “You should have met him before the surgery. He was so *good*.” She unzipped me and grabbed low-down.

“Tell me,” I said. And her hand moved up and down.

“We used to go on walks,” she said. “They make leashes for them too, but they’re expensive—we would just walk without one.”

“I wish I could’ve met him then,” I said.

Things were almost over now. She got up close, right on top of me, every

part of her on mine.

“Me too,” she said.

When I went outside that night to go, I remember thinking about her mother and about my own mother. I was trying to remember something my mother told me, something about the night. The shutters on the houses of the avenue were all closed—two, three, four stories insides hidden from passers-by. An ice-cream truck crooned from ways away. I hailed a cab but let it go. I nearly crossed the street then didn't. I sat down on the curb, saw water collect beneath a sewer grate. In my shirt pocket I found a petal of lettuce and held it for a moment, then let it sit on my tongue.

Wexner, Wexner

Thousands gathered in the Wexner Auditorium¹ shortly after President Wexner Wexner², President of The Wexner State University³, informed the public of a forthcoming declaration of unparalleled precedence. For many, as was made evident by an immediate rising of bodies in the isles as The President entered the auditorium, there existed not even a momentary consideration for latter disappointment. And already he had begun shaking hands, ascending through the back of the stadium, onward to the stage. For the other few, the skeptical, those who had come but with reservations, they remained in their seats for some moments longer. This, of course, until he climbed the stairs of the auditorium stage, his head fixed on the masses of scarlet and grey— his arm elbow-locked, laying forearm-long strokes back-and-forth through the air, coming home.

With this fell the skeptics, whose fists unclenched and knees willfully unbent into standing posture. Together they moved upwards to take place in the crowd—and so the theater was joined, waiting in hysterical ovation for the first words to part from those closed, dear lips.

President Wexner tapped twice on the Wexner⁴. The speech began under a most impressive satin banner, which read: “The Wexner State University.”

“Good afternoon, thank you all for Wexner.”

The crowd found they could not applaud any louder, and so sat back down

¹ Formerly ‘Drake Auditorium’

² Formerly ‘President Michael Drake’

³ Formerly ‘The Ohio State University’

⁴ Formerly ‘Microphone’

only to stand up immediately, for a second standing ovation.

“This day, today, will be remembered as one of the great milestones in history of The Wexner State University.”

For a moment, President Wexner paused, stopped, and looked out amongst the uproar. He raised a steady hand to grasp a gold-laced handle, dangling on end from a rope hung above. The uproar subsided. A moment. And the hand came down, pulling the rope, releasing the “The Wexner State University” banner from the heavens. The absence of the sacred banner revealed the presence of another—the most sacred of banners, more sacred than the previous one, glistening with a pride so unbridled, so immediate, that many of the members of the audience were forced to put on their sunglasses which all happened to share neon arms alongside black frames.

The banner read:

“The Wexner Wexner Wexner”

The women broke down—effaced with a wonder of the world simply too regal to endure. Even a few of the men shed a tear in this intimate moment. These few turned to their neighbors with clasped hands, now moist from weeping prayers. In this moment, one most truly revealing (as has since been argued by academics and scholars alike) the Character built within The Wexner Wexner Wexner—the men were embraced rather than patronized.

“This is the greatest day of all time, ever, in the history of everything,” said

President Wexner.

President Wexner reached under the scarlet and gray podium and revealed, in his hand, a portrait of a United States soldier in full uniform.

Before the president could speak the entire audience was on their feet again.

“This is a US soldier,” President Wexner said into the Wexner, and because the crowd was so loud, he couldn’t be sure they had heard him.

“This...is a United States soldier,” he said once more.

In an unprecedented gesture of enthusiasm, the crowd stood on top of their seats. This moment, by now imbued with auras of fated mysticism rather than fact, was to be known as the first “standing on chairs” ovation in the history of The Wexner Wexner Wexner. To commemorate the occasion, this new form of ovation that had never been done before, not among classrooms nor offices nor cathedrals, was named “Wexner”—in honor of Les Wexner.

Fathers tucked their sons under their arms and into their sides. Mothers were unable even to distinguish which faces belonged to their own children. Such was the state of their affection for the collective, their familial inclinations flooded outwards into distant memories.

President Wexner had never seen a crowd so patriotic, so blessed. As he stared into his public, a ghostly image of the constitution rose from the essences of each and every body in the audience. He removed his cap and placed it on his heart, let tears run down his cheeks and well in his eyes before he spoke once more.

“This Wexner, the most spiritus of spirit, Wexner. In my history, my Wexner, ever has there been. Let us all, utmost, of the greatest affections—spirit, heart,

courage, Wexner. Together. With unity, we strive and so are, blessed for the grace. We heal. We Create. A symbolic milestone, rigorous, a crucible of learning, and wonder. But for this, for the United States of America.”

President Wexner held up the picture of a United States soldier once more. The crowd, attempting to twice create a new form of ovation exceeding the enthusiasm of before, jumped up and down on their chairs while clapping. As this form of ovation had also never been done before, anywhere, it too beckoned for a name. And so it was, “Wexner”—in honor of Him.

“To Mirror Lake!” was blurted out, somewhere within the temple.

It isn’t known who spoke the words, though it’s rumored that they were uttered from the mouth of the great Wexner Wexner⁵. But perhaps (for it is a writer’s duty to confront lingering tragedy) it shall never be known.

The aisles quickly cleared, as if the exits to the auditorium were magnetized, pulling the audience outward towards heaven itself.

Within minutes the room was deserted. All that remained in the hall were the scattered dollar bills that ended up on the floor during the crowd’s hurried attempt to reward each other for their patriotism.

A slumbering janitor inside the maintenance closet of the theater was awoken by the commotion. Through the graded inlets in the door streamed filed rays of light, pushing past echoes of the final sounds of the ceremony. He rose from the bucket he’d nestled on and turned the knob, let it all in around him, right there on the mezzanine of the auditorium. He took a broom to his right hand and readied

⁵ Formerly ‘Archie Griffin’

a dustpan in his left. Looking out at the thousands of single bills, the tattered aisles, the fallen banner strewn across the stage, a troubling thought rose within him—and because there was no one to hear it, the thought was said aloud.

Go on, you Patriot

After preparing his Monday morning smoothie of sliced carrot spears, raw ginger, and washed bunches of kale he'd purchased from the farmer's market, Dr. Franklyn Sinaatra looked downwards into the pulp-orange stomach of his blender and was struck by an unprecedented deposition of moral clarity—a realization. He had forgotten about 9/11.

It'd been some time since he'd forgotten, for exactly how long he could not remember. He had only remembered in this moment that he had forgotten, and knew he could not be allowed to forget again.

He raced upstairs, through the bedroom door of his sleeping wife whom he'd had considerable trouble conversing with since finding a certain worn drawers of another male held tightly to her nostrils. A next affair would preferably hold court with a brief-less man, or a boxer-less man, though boxers had once more come into fashion. Thoughts for later.

"Honey. I forgot about 9/11," he said.

She turned from her bedside to face him and clasped his hand to her chest, the way she did on their third date at the drive through theater after he told her he'd received his fourth and final malpractice suit.

"How could this happen?" she said.

He brushed her bangs behind her ears.

"I don't know," he said. "Forget I said anything," and upon walking away added, "don't forget, though."

He descended quickly from the eighteenth floor of the walk-up sky rise, whose design functioned both for his health and as a forceful reminder of the importance of returning home in sober condition. His drive to the practice each morning meant circumventing the populated regions of Bushwick (a fact he would proudly declare in conversation to fellow practitioner's in Green Point and Park Slope), leading him to the outskirts where one could conduct practice without troubles from the Board. And yet there were other troubles, troubles of life on the outskirts. Troubles of a young woman sat teething in his waiting room, shaking white-knuckles quietly at a Boy's Life Magazine.

At the reception desk across from the young woman, behind a sheet of bulletproof glass and a small sliding window, was a small call bell one expects to find atop hotel desks. He reached through the window. Rang it. Waited. Alice, the only secretary who'd managed to apply for the position, wasn't yet in.

The young woman was dressed in a way that was both completely harnessing (so far as one's attention is concerned), inappropriate, and immediately arousing. One would expect, as did the Doctor in this case, complete plainclothes from a waiting patient, especially a first-time waiting patient. Dressed in an unrevealing dress, something that might be worn to a modern funeral where the requirement for black attire succumbed to a more advanced theory of morality that denounces anything of the sort. In this age, mourning was not worn but felt.

Regardless, she was present in a black lace dress, in which circular portions of her naked body were revealed under the dress designed tattered, and could justly be mistaken for an escort. And so he fled the room, proceeding quickly into a room

where a patient might one-day be waiting for consultation, hoping this leaving would prompt a fleeing of the corresponding thoughts.

This brought a memory to the doctor's attention, an incident at the Fourth Street Pound, where he'd gone to meet a dear friend of his who'd dropped out from medical school in favor of veterinary studies. After a pleasant meeting with this Dr. Raymond, he had been forced to exit through a hallway packed on both sides with caged animals, who were arranged back-to-front from the heart of the office according to how long left it would be until they were put down in a way deemed most humane by the prevailing veterinarian authorities at the time. As a result, when one began ones trek from inside the offices, there was a prevailing feeling of optimism. These animals would have weeks left to be found by their owners or discovered by a hopeful pet-owner. But the ones closest to the door, destined for the needle, they wore the unmistakable mark of desperation in the form of a quiet existential submissiveness, portrayed by either sleeping eternally or by a tightening of their pupils, which proportionally increased the whiteness of their eyes and gave them an eerily human presence.

It was these animals, by the door, made cold in intervals when the office's door was struck open in midwinter, that harnessed the attention of this Doctor Franklyn Sinaatra. In particular, it was an old Maltese whose cage sported the nametag "Giorgio", fashioned by clothespin to one of the bars.

It was a strangely compelling name for a pet, the Doctor was forced to admit. It struck the speaker in a way that required significant forethought in each instance the name was uttered, in the same way one would address a senior widow of

English royalty. One could not say, "Come here Giorgio!" No, this was far too patronizing. More fitting was, "Come Giorgio," said matter-of-factly, where all affection was contained in the semantics of the phrase rather than in tone (such fruity expulsions of affection were suited for the "Spot's" and "Cocoa's" of the dog-world). Also appropriate were regular inserts of "my" before the dog was addressed, or an "ah". "Ah, my Giorgio," would be considered most pleasant by the animal, and would represent the owner's understanding of the class in which the four-legged bitch was brought up within. And because the Doctor was conscious of the dialect in which the elderly dog must be addressed, and because he was fighting the nagging sensation that another would not (this and that the dog would be receiving a lethal injection minutes after Dr. Raymond had finished his blueberry muffin on his mid-morning break), he at once seized the noble beast as his own.

How these musings had been poignant to the events at hand, to the escort whose bare thighs were exposed shamelessly by a crossing of her legs, forcing one to imagine a well-groomed vagina and a career choice willfully chosen out of insatiable sexual hunger rather than financial discomfort, were alike in that both creatures produced a sense of pity that manifests in certain men like hope, even Love.

For this reason the Doctor ran the two through his mind in parallel, searching for an answer of whether she should be approached or handled by the secretary, or dismissed entirely without interactions at all. The pressing question, which through analysis of this question would yield the answer, was whether or not these intoxicating feelings of hope (which when guarded are common in producing the

sensation of love) would extinguish after a time. Would noble Giorgio's multiple feedings and walks tire the spirit of the doctor? Would the great lengths with which the Doctor would have to address Giorgio eventually erode at the spirit of the Doctor, make him regret the purchase altogether? Would the intoxication following the rescuing of a damsel ever cease to be Love, breaking down into an eventual declaration of suppressed regret?

And so in the same way, if the doctor were to rescue this escort from her troubles, to take her for dinner and give his all to bed her, to marry her in order to remove her from ever selling her flesh for livelihood, saving her, would one day he wake up and see nothing lying near him but a half-clothed beast?

It was unclear to the Doctor, but being that his current wife had not been able to sum up the vitality required to sleep with him in some months, and because he hadn't the time to take care of his load himself that morning due to a prolonged enjoyment of his coffee—he pronounced himself very much in Love, trusting completely in his analyses that with her and his dear Giorgio, never would there be a sobering moment in which regret would rise from his heart, citing imagined moments where he would set an expensive cut of Tenderloin to sear on the stove before serving it in three servings divided equally between the three of them.

There would need to be a divorce set in motion first, of course, his own wife must be attended to, but truly there's nothing occult about divorce, it isn't an issue where one must involve Research Institutions in order to discover whether its inner-workings and mechanisms (as one might for resolving issues of Consciousness, whether it's reducible to brain states or is the result of a certain

immaterial substance) are possible or even conceivable, it's merely some money and a few lawyers set out for a time until a conclusion is come to. In this way, divorce is perhaps one of the most boring of human procedures, never are there advancements made in it due to political theory or psychology, it's mechanics are entirely transparent, waiting to be deployed by the signing of a form or by years of distance symptomatic of a regrettable incompatibility.

The Doctor had nearly come to an answer as to whether or not the love for the stray dog or an alluring escort could survive indefinitely, but just before the thesis had shown itself to him two alarming notions struck loudly. First, his ruminations had once again reminded him that he'd forgotten about 9/11. Second, that there was naked woman sitting upright across from him on the patient table, eying him in an unmistakably critical manner.

He became grave, nearly reddened, while asking how she'd entered, but swallowed and smoothed his lips together, capturing a wilted tongue inside his teeth and retorting clearly on the matter. What did she think of pound mutts over breeder's dogs?

"Breeder's," she said, "You want one that dies after you," and the Doctor felt she'd given him wise words on two fronts.

It had now been thirty minutes past opening and Alice was late.

"Are you the Doctor?" she said.

"Yes. Dr. Sinaatra,"

"Like the singer?"

"No, mine's with two A's,"

“So is his,” she said.

And it was.

The intercom rang in the room, a buzz.

“Alice?” he said.

“You’re currently seeing a patient, Doctor,” she said.

“Thank you Alice,” he said, and returned to the young woman.

She explained her ailments, her concerns. How her big toe on her left foot was fine but it just felt like sometimes that her big toe on the other one, on the right foot, didn’t always *feel* like it was hers, you know. It just felt like it was someone else’s and she wanted it to feel like hers like the other one did.

During the speech the Doctor turned to face his practice window. He was watching the morning traffic barreling down DeKalb Avenue. Franklyn handed her a prescription, begged her to hold to the waiting room for a moment, and left the office. He wandered to the garage where he found his vehicle, a Turquoise old muscle dig. Two cars surrounded the vehicle. On the car in front, a bumper sticker read, Keep back, baby in the bunker, with a depiction of an infant holding a Thompson rifle and wearing an egg-shaped helmet with the chinstraps undone.

As the Doctor pulled out of his spot, he paid meticulous attention to not hit the back of the vehicle, for by declaration of the sticker, there was an infant inside. It was a principle he now understood, and declared it loudly in the second person.

We remember what our eyes remind us to remember.

This understanding served an answer to the question, which sent Franklyn Sinaatra to the DMV, where he waited in line for the remainder of the day in order to

inquire about designing a “Never Forget” bumper sticker, with a small sketch of two buildings razed (which looked an awful lot like no buildings at all, something which took him an additional fifteen minutes to explain to the teller). He was made to realize the DMV was not this sort of place—that the task of preserving patriotism, in testament to the modern preservation of democracy, was left in the hands of the people. It was back to the office then.

“Is it cancer?” a patient repeated, and the puzzle of his critical expression was solved.

He would have to employ some sort of strategy in order to make sure the tragedy would stay with him. Some sort of pneumonic device, like those incomprehensible memory practitioners who claim to paint mental pictures with the innumerable digits of pi—chasing infinity. He could move to a troubled neighborhood where often he’d be mugged and need to type in the three digits on the phone in order to beckon help. It wouldn’t take that, though, he could even move to a neighborhood only somewhat troubled, where the looming threat of danger would be enough to consider calling—even if actual danger was improbable. There was much research to be done, to find a city whose ethos occupied the space between threat and action, the goal to be in constant fear but never truly harmed—to achieve a patriot’s homeostasis.

“No, of course not,” said the Doctor, who was exceedingly optimistic only when caught off guard, and then became somewhat proud of his facility for introspection and made a note of this to himself. This seemed to relax the patient, who immediately stepped down from the table and began to clothe herself.

He picked up her chart from the counter next to him and then began to read through it. He then added,

“Though it very well could be. I’ll have to contact a specialist,” and scribbled a name and number on a card which he fit into the woman’s hand before exiting to the waiting room to charm an unlikely muse.

He found her chair empty.

“Alice,” he said to a preoccupied secretary, “wasn’t someone sitting there this morning?”

“Yes, doctor,” she replied. Doctor Sinaatra approached her.

“And now she’s gone, Alice,” he said.

“That’s right, Doctor,” she said, and took an incoming call.

He tried to squeal out the question over the phone call, where had she gone? After a series of pantomimes, Alice held her hand to the mouth of the receiver, and then held one finger to the door while mouthing the words—*out that door*.

He took back to the station wagon, falling into the driver’s seat, shifting *drive* and listening. On the radio was Elbin’s “Make this tomato want it”, the popular song of the day. Not hillbilly rock, nothing righteous like crusaders, just a heartbeat of a bass and a kicker for a chorus, something you could sing to, though the Doctor didn’t but wanted to want to. There was the never forget business, and then this tune, something on the radio. One always has questions for a man who doesn’t sing to the radio. It’s phrased in many ways, sure, but these ways can always be substituted for a simple, “why?” And there’d be nothing to say. Just a shrug. If you’re the kind of man to forget, to take on “make a tomato want it” on the radio and

not wag a finger, you gotta be ready to be thrown—smashed lightbulb and all, into a black room, awaiting interrogations. Hard social inquisitions.

The vehicle coasted through a yellow traffic light. A security camera clicked on twice, a blinking yellow light, right on the end of the block. Two shots then—two shots on each vehicle nearly running red or running red, then a ticket in the mail for two hundred fifty dollars collected at once or marginalized with a certain interest inversely proportional to the time invested until the dues would be satisfied.

By lulling a patient, by temporarily foregoing his presence at the practice, the Doctor was momentarily able to revitalize from inside himself a sense of the importance of a moment absent of obligations. He took to the curb, slid back next to a hydrant, and kept his eyes somewhere upward.

In the coming minutes, Dr. Franklyn Sinaatra splayed himself on the hood of his car while an eye ferociously perusing inside an opened box of Jujubes, maniacally combing at the bottom of the carton for a sole granule that'd become caked onto the paper in the summer heat. The candy would either be removed from the packaging or he'd be excommunicated from the street corner by uniformed official—these the only conditions under which his eye might part from the box top.

And then there was the third way—which the doctor had not considered. It entailed something like the following.

A massive patriot could pull through the very same yellow light, and upon hearing the twice-snapping of the automated camera, roll up each flannel shirtsleeve and turn facedown a picture of his daughter on the dash before throwing himself from a vehicle that'd yet come to a full stop. And with a cool maniacal strut,

would approach an elderly man in possession of a film camera to whose first words would be, “now I’m on your camera,” and in one delicate motion unwrap the shoulder strap tethered to the camera resting on the old man’s shoulder, then fire it deep into the road’s opposition where it would come to a declarative halt by hot concrete. A smashing. Then an old man would protest, a vague translation of loud bumbling and coughing into a sort of English no longer spoken, where the old man would motion to the traffic camera, then the bank’s security camera (pivoting like a metronome along the block’s length), then a satellite’s perched rolling around the atmosphere above, and finally to a police car where on the hood was mounted a radar gun and a dash-mounted surveillance device. And then to the cameras that weren’t there but could have been, the old man would continue, the places our pictures are taken—the shopping districts, the offices, the markets, citing sober-toned statistics telling that the number was upwards of one hundred each day. All this spoken in a bumbling hysterical huff.

The old man would walk quietly to each piece of his camera, collecting them under his vest with support from his forearms so that no piece might fall, and then with a shaking hand would retrieve a small pair of eyeglasses. Together he and Dr. Sinaatra would stand separately gazing upon the departing car, where inside the man had by then regained himself after a quick lick of the thumb that upturned a family photograph. All this in a car whose bumper had received a maniacal slapping-on of the sticker, *Never Forget*.

It so happened that the removal of the Dr.’s eye from the belly of the container happened in the third way—rather than the second or the first.

Something in seeing the old man fumble with his property in his shirt, struggle onto a park bench, and then begin fingering the pockets of each coat in an increasingly more frantic manner (which revealed clearly that there was something which the old man had had in mind and was becoming a certain sort of desperate to recover), lead Franklyn from the hood of his vehicle towards the bench, where because he had struggled *ad nauseam* in the task of freeing a stubbornly sun-baked Jujube from a crevice in a plastic container, felt a camaraderie that men can only have when sentenced to mutual hysteria under a common problem—where the severities and complexities of a situation cannot be appreciated by another uninvolved in it, so much so that it would be insulting, patronizing, to offer condolences or even conversation about the event had one himself not struggled with it as well.

The sensation doubled over on itself, strengthening in Dr. Franklyn Sinaatra's midriff as he encroached the bench, where the totality of the thought opened up to him, that what it felt like to look at this old fellow must be what it is to look at one's own father. So he sat. He revealed to the old man the carton, showing him by means of positioning the container lengthways, as to give a view all the way to the bottom the resting candy bean. The old man gave a short look into the box, upturned one corner of his mouth, and then quickly his eyes guided his hands once more into the remaining inner pockets of his vest and pants.

"The car," said the old man who was murmuring plate numbers and letters in an indiscernible order. "Do you have a pen?"

And Franklyn did. “Certainly,” he said. He retrieved it along with a small notepad he’d kept for off-book diagnostics, and held it out for the old man to scarf through. He tore threw a page, mumbled a sequence through the pen onto the paper, and then paused to reiterate it, replacing many characters of the sequence with other numbers, other letters. In all, there were four tries spelled out, one or none that might ultimately correspond to the fled vehicle. The probability of the situation was realized by the old man. He wore the understanding in a grimace. A lens fell from the bench. Then a viewfinder—then a flash. He removed the strap from his shoulder and sank into himself, hocking up something devilish in the throat, wiping himself under the eyes.

The thought pained him too, the doctor noted, but felt that never before was there a moment in which the old man needed a greater degree of reassurance that he was not embarking alone.

“We’ll find that sticker,” said Dr. Franklyn Sinaatra to an elderly man half-dead on a park bench.

The Gardener

On some mornings there was the sun; on others there was dirt, or men. On some mornings like these he awoke and began to think about some of these things (and some other things mind you).

"Where have I left my tools?" Hempley murmured.

His back was awry and he'd picked his nails too short the previous night.

"I've picked my nails too short the previous night," Hempley thought.

Hempley always thought about his nails.

"I'm always thinking about my nails," said Hempley.

Hempley didn't like being written about,

"and I don't like being written about" said Hempley.

It seemed about the right time for Hempley to begin his morning. He scraped around (just like a damn dog) for his tools to begin working.

"Just like a damn dog" he thought.

His tools were never in his shed, though there were boxes unused. They sat on the soil guarding the vegetables, the vegetables enjoyed the company and tools didn't feel cold at night so who cares? (Tools feeling cold at night, can you imagine? Tools don't feel the cold at night.)

Hempley began to dig. He noticed the dirt leaving the ground (you could fit a breast in a circle hole, Hempley noted) and a few men walking by outside his wooden fence observing the struggle. Hempley reached his potatoes,

"I've reached my potatoes," he said.

He continued to dig while glancing over at the men walking by. He continued pulling arms, legs, bodies, limbs, out of the ground. One of the men stopped briefly to look over at him.

"How are you Hempley?" he asked.

"Oh you know, I am and I'm not." He smiled.

The man sighed and continued on his way, watching him scramble in an empty hole. He thought again to tell Hempley, as he had thought the day before, that a man has no business in an empty hole. But, he decided to forego this thought until tomorrow—he had his own business to attend to.

Hempley fled the hole—the man had already gone. The potatoes all sat in a pile next to the big circle hole. "I could fit a breast in there," Hempley thought.

He was done digging for now. He imagined filling the hole with all the men and women. Droplets took form on the edges of his eyelids.

"What a day that would be, to pick men and women like lemon from a tree."

Before Hempley went inside to make his breakfast he lay in his hole for a while, it made his ears cool and he seemed to enjoy the sensation.

"Lying here in this hole cools my ears," Hempley said.

He felt all the bodies pressed up against him, breathing deeply and together. He felt an erection. Or a finger? Or a toe? Hempley decided it didn't matter and climbed out of the breast and moved to the house.

He tossed a large pancake on the stovetop and turned to set his place at the table. A young girl sat in the seat across from his, she had her legs crossed in the chair and was playing with her toes.

"Hello, Girly!" Hempley smiled at his little girly.

"Hi Hempley," she said; she was playing with her toes.

He put his pancake in front of her and stopped being hungry.

"What did you dig up today Hempley?"

"Just some potatoes."

"Are we going to play today?"

"No, not today."

Hempley rolled a cigarette at the table, the girl handed him his matches and he smoked while she ate. He glanced at a picture of the girly, him, and a woman.

Hempley walked outside and left the door open behind him. People were still walking by. He moved over to his hole and stared down into it. Everyone was walking by and lying there together—arms and legs and ears; and toe nails. And then they were not. "Oh goodness," he thought. He flicked his cigarette into the hole and glanced back at the house; the girl was standing in the doorway. He was thinking, "no, not today."

He said, "no, not today."

Hempley gathered the fruits and vegetables of his labor and fled the front gate, headed to make his route for the day. Gentleman and ladies gathered outside of their doors as he approached, holding out money for him to take as he dropped off goods. People almost said things, but did not. Hempley walked, distributing

goods. "How quiet the neighborhood is, surely satiated hunger cheers the calloused."

When he approached his final door for morning, Hempley knocked lightly, but persistently, enough so that at no time was there not a knock (one cannot know goods are being sold without a plentiful knocking). An old woman approached after some time, cracking the door to see Hempley grinning largely with potatoes in sack.

"Mrs. Chambers, your potatoes are waiting."

"Hempley, I hope you're feeling ok. Is your daughter well?"

"Yes of course, she's at home playing with her toes."

The old woman sighed.

"Would you bring her over some time? We can have tea, I've still saved some old nuts in the kitchen."

"I've never been much of a nut fan, my sweet, but I must say that your door has charmed me. Seeing you is a pleasure I enjoy."

"Please do come by, I think it's time we spoke."

Hempley had already turned off, trotting lightly down the patio steps toward the main road and murmuring to himself (for Hempley enjoyed to murmur to himself): "One day an old woman she'll be, but for this time my Girly waits for me."

--

On some nights I would sit with her on top of the barn, at the tip of the triangle where the two red-tiled roof panels met. She would say things like, "I'd like to go down now" and I'd say things like, "I'm very in love with you," and hold her knee.

On the nights that I liked, (on the nights that I remember most) she would say nothing and smile, leaning towards me. Her lips would then be kissed.

It had been twelve years living in this way with moments like this one. Most of the time I would wake up earlier and begin on the yard work, tending to grass, talking to my favorite chicken. (“Good morning Maurice, your feathers have always looked wonderful and today they also look wonderful. You are a chicken who gives me great pleasure.”)

By the time Maurice and I finished our morning conversation she would already be awake in the kitchen cooking pancakes and coffee, baking rye toast. At this point she would shower and brush her teeth. Her morning breath was terrible. She’d always been self-conscious of it.

In any case I could not help it, kissing her in the morning. There are some things that you must endure as a married man, I’ve learned. When I think about it, I’m comforted she doesn’t go through the trouble. When she’s warm in the morning, before a cold shower, her face sags slightly—revealing a certain chubbiness reserved to men by wives. I could never stop myself from playing with her morning face before we began our days.

I would like to spend some time discussing my wife’s death, beginning with the moment I decided I would never love her.

She worked a job that isn’t done any more, I assume, by people of her type. She would come by the garden selling nuts. Almonds, walnuts, sometimes figs. I thought she wasn’t attractive enough to give any more time to than the polite but immediate “No thank you,” before closing the door with equal form. No slamming

certainly, not lightly though. After the first few times she would stop mentioning she was selling anything at all. I'd see her step through the crack in the wooden fence and tiptoe her way in between crops while holding her hat—one of those wide brimmed hats that rounded up at the edges, all straw. I remember watching her do this from the second floor, noticing her sundress, and being slightly annoyed that I'd have to answer the door, knowing that it was possible, (definite now that I think about it) that she may, or probably or definitely, have seen me through the two-inch crack between the curtain and the bottom of the window. I'd be slightly annoyed that I'd have to put out the cigarette I'd just lit. But I'd have to, only smokers want to smell cigarettes, even if it's someone you don't care for, someone just doing their job. I also noticed it was my last cigarette from the pack. If it were not, I may have felt nothing. But as it was, I began to feel a sense of shame—waste of a cigarette for a nobody-nut-girl. With a sundress on.

I got downstairs and mistakenly opened the door right before she rang—I'd meant to open it five to ten seconds after she'd rung.

She said, "How are you, Hempley?"

"I'll take some walnuts."

"Oh ok, great."

She shuffled around in a panic and grabbed a small bag while I was figuring out why I was buying walnuts. She handed the bag to me and said,

"They're really good, you know, good fats, they're good for you."

"Yeah," I started to close the door.

"Hold on."

This time I remember. Open the door slowly, and don't smile.

"It's three dollars for the walnuts."

The walnuts.

I handed her a five, and she stuck it in her bag (her nutbag) and sat there for a second. It was the first time I looked at her face and it was much redder than mine; sweaty, probably even tired.

"Ok then."

Close the door quickly, not rushed.

"Do you think I could come in for a glass of water? I'm sorry."

She was wearing sandals, her toenails were painted white and I'm sure I've never seen that before. Her feet were veiny, her calve muscles protruded outwards about half way up the back of her shins. Her knees I couldn't quite make out because of the--

"Ok then, well I'll see you next week."

"Yes."

"Yes?"

"You can come in for a glass of water."

I wish she were prettier; I didn't like her face. Small nose, ears the same, a chubby chin with a semi-circle indent outlined by her bottom lip. I didn't like her lips either, too red, it made her skin look too white.

Her eyes too, light brown and nearly circular. When she blinked it looked like she was hiding chestnuts—a kind of party trick.

Another thing I didn't like were her eyebrows, too defined and much too dark. I could see some of the hairs standing up facing me, out of line and probably un-groomable. I bet her breasts were nothing special either, I bet I'd seen better. They were probably very hard, very small, and the nipples might be-

"I'm going to walk in now."

The sun shone behind her, through the door and onto the floorboards, as she pushed one of my shoulders aside with her own. For a second more than I'd wanted to, my head lingered on her while she walked behind me. It was a beautiful day, I was enjoying my good fortune as gardeners in good weather do. It's important that I say it, how good the sun feels on the back of ones neck on these days. It is essential that the sun is felt on the back of ones neck from time to time. One must look back in these instances; it is essential to the warmth of the neck. That's why I lingered on her. That's how it happened.

"I found the kitchen," she said.

"There's water on the tap."

"What about the water in the fridge?" she said.

"There's water in the fridge."

I've never seen a woman have a bigger glass of water, her hand barely fit halfway around it. The Mason jar lid lay half-opened on the bridge of her nose while she gulped the water down. She made this stupid squinting face as the metal fastener on the Mason jar pushed on her now-closed eyes, chestnuts. She drank the whole thing in that one, stupid-faced sip.

"Is it O.K. if I have one more?"

“Yes, but please use a glass this time. I save those for the herbs.”

I sat down on my couch by the window and she sat across from me, holding a glass that people usually drink water out of.

“Do you mind if I smoke in here?”

Lord.

“Yes, it’s fine.”

“You look like you want a cigarette. Would you like a cigarette?”

“What kind are they?”

I don’t know why I asked that, I’ve never asked that before.

“Here,” she said.

“Thanks, I’ll be right back,” and I moved towards the stairs.

“I’ve got a lighter right here, don’t worry,” and she reached into her nutbag.

“Alright, thank you.”

A meaningless thank you, said robotically, atonally.

When she took a drag she held her cigarette with her middle finger and her thumb, choking it. Unattractive. Between drags she’d hold it with her index finger and thumb, just until it touched her lips again. Then, supported by her lips, she’d let go for a moment to hold it with her middle finger and thumb again. She ashed on my table, always looked at me when she did. When she put the cigarette back in her mouth a smile would escape—amused with herself. She didn’t think I’d be able to notice the smile squeaking out around the cigarette. I did notice; I’m a perceptive man. I looked over at the orange sitting in the fruit bowl, the first one I’d taste later to decide if it was time to harvest.

“Are you saving that for later?”

“No, I’m going to eat it today. I pick out one orange right when they’re in season and eat it first to make sure they’re--”

“Your cigarette.”

Sitting between my middle finger and thumb. I quickly brought it to my lips and lit it. She smiled the same way she had after she’d ashed on the table, no cigarette to hide it. Immediately she blushed. I took my cigarette away from my mouth with my index finger and thumb.

“We should be together,” she said.

Already she’d recovered from her blush.

I responded by telling her everything I disliked about her. The way she made me put out my last cigarette, the glass she drank out of, her profession, her physical qualities, her sundress, the way she held her cigarette, the way she ducked under my fence to get into my Garden.

So the next day I met her down the road at nine in the morning. She said she’d have something for me. She was late so I thought about my oranges. They weren’t ready—too white. I imagined her walking towards me, struggling with her hat as the wind picked up. She showed up on a bike, one of those French (maybe Key West) style bikes that little girls and grown French women ride. Different sundress, same hat; there’s the nutbag. She took her hat off and put it on me, dropped the nutbag on the ground and handed me a note.

“I’m going to leave now, I’ll see you when you’re done. Sorry about the oranges.”

And she was gone. I opened the note: a list of addresses. I kicked the bag on its side and finished thinking about my oranges. A few bags spilled out. I collected them and put them back in. The nuts. Everyone on the route bought something and they all smiled too, nothing hard about it. I walked up to the last house on the list, knocked, and, waited. An old woman opened the door, stuck her hand inside the bag, pulled out a small bag of walnuts, threw three dollars on the ground and slammed the door. I picked them up and turned around and there she was, probably having waited there for a while. I'd probably walked past her on the way to the house and not even noticed. She took her hat off my head and put it on hers. Before she could grab the nutbag I dropped it on the dirt between us. Ninety-four dollars for five hours work, more than something. She put her hand out. I pulled the money out of my pocket and put it in her hand. With her thumb and pinky around my fingers she locked me in, my hand in hers and the money in between. She stepped closer, tilting up her head, the straw ends of the hat grazing my forehead and then my hairline as she got closer. She took her hand off mine, slid it around my waist, I reached up to her cheek. The money fell, ninety-four dollars whipping around us.

We were married for twelve years. She sold nuts; I worked in the Garden. We had a daughter. My wife's sundresses in my closet, she had many. She would complain of her cough, and I would lend her my handkerchief. Our daughter rode in the basket on the front of her bike, holding the nutbag in her lap, eating pancakes, smiling and receiving kisses. They rode after work, through the road passing

through the town, past the road, into the dirt, into the hills, up onto cliffs. We ate my fruit and her nuts on cliff tops. We smoked cigarettes while our daughter sucked on blades of grass, tiptoeing in fields like arrays of tightropes. We bought her a little hat, one of those wide brimmed hats that rounded up at the edges, all straw. We went home and slept. My wife slept in her dress and never woke up. We walked out into the garden. I dug a hole, she watched me dig. She climbed into it. I held her hand and she smiled, ashing on my table, always looked at me when she did. People walk by while I bury her. People walk by and I bury them.

Letters for my Father

*The 19th of October, on the
year of Two-thousand-and-
fifteen, which comes after
Two-thousand-and-fourteen
and before Two-thousand-
and-sixteen*

Dear Mr. Heb,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to consider your story, "Letters to my Father." It's quite an ambitious project, that of trying to show, in just a few pages, the lives of many. But you're mostly able to pull it off. Unfortunately, the story isn't quite right for us, despite its evident merit. I would be interested in seeing some of your other stories, however, should you have anything that feels complete. As is customary, I have attached your copy of the submitted story in, the event that it may be suited for another publication.

Again, thanks for the look, and all best in placing this story.

Sincerely,

Leeward Elters

The New Yorker

Fiction Department

April twenty-fifth, Two-thousand-and-fourteen

Dear Dad,

An old college buddy of mine, my friend Barrett, just moved out to New York the other day after his dog died. His wife left him, too. The dog, though. He had a Chow Chow, my friend Barrett. It's a Chinese dog—they call it a mix between a lion and a bear. You, of course, remember hearing about the Chow from our neighborhood years ago. It mangled a few kids in the neighborhood and then was subjected to a lengthy court battle where it narrowly eschewed a death sentence. I remember because I saw it in the news, but also because I'm an intimate contact of Barrett's. After one of the kids was hospitalized all the stations covered it. He was a little Latino boy named Pacingo (PUH-CHING-GO is how it's pronounced). I told Sue it was PUH-SING-GO before, I heard someone say it in the news. She told me no one was named Pacingo and that I'd misheard, but my ears are good so I didn't think so. Think of that. Pacingo. The boy in the hospital.

Yesterday we had coffee, Barrett and I, and he told me about his wife, ex-wife actually. Her name is Chandraileeniie. Chandraileeniie Booulayvaunteinne is her full name. Her father was an illiterate immigrant Bird Butcher (a fascinating detail, the sole butcher I've heard of who'm' worked exclusively with birds. Birds are the only protein source available in her home country, the location of which Barrett didn't specify—I felt it was not something worth prying into) who came upon the last name after parsing through the state's immigration records and copying the letter characters in an order that was aesthetically pleasant to him. Why they were

forced to change their names upon arrival, Father, I simply couldn't say—but you are aware as I of the horrors and multitudes of circumstances that cast the lifestyle of the refugee.

Later the Butcher learned to read and write, and decided to give Chandraileeniie a more normalized first name to complement her surname. In fact, Barrett spent the better part of a minute relaying to me the ridicule she avoided on the playgrounds as a child with such a name, for none of the other children could invent a nickname with which to tease her. I hope this is a lesson you will commit to memory in the event that you choose to produce another child.

Sue and I hope you are well. We spoke of you fondly over Triscuits and tea last afternoon.

Your son,

Dickly

*September fourteenth, Two-thousand-and-
fourteen*

Dear Pop,

I apologize for not including the postage with my last letter and for your response. I'm not the sort of man that makes the same mistake (Carlin teaches us that it is a syntactic fallacy to tack the commonly-placed word "twice" at the expression's end—for if one were to make the same mistake *twice*, they would have actually made the mistake *three* times. This sort of notion, which momentarily wakes one from unconscious utterances of lazy predetermined cultural phrases, suffices as grounds for a letter of its own), and so I have included a Leatherback Turtle that I have whittled in my spare time. The Leatherback Turtle is the largest species of turtle known to man (right now this is a contentious point among Tortelian Paleontologists, so it would be best for you to keep this *fact* (I plead with you also to not mention that I have said fact, it would boil the collective blood of the experts in the field) to yourself), and so it should fetch you at least seven dollars at the nearest Pawn Shop. For your convenience, I have provided the address of the Pawn Shop closest to you, and in addition have included a small blurb from the shop's internet address so that you are familiar with the shop's philosophy.

Dr. Peinstigg's 24/7 Pawn Lawn - "The World's First Outdoor Pawn Shop"[™]

3070 Arctic Blvd

Anchorage, AK 99503

My name is Dr. Peinstigg and I've got a Pawn shop for *you*. Not only are we "The World's First Outdoor Pawn Shop™", but with temperatures averaging under 7 degrees Fahrenheit, we're also "The World's Coldest Pawn Shop™". Remember to bring your coat, or better yet, "Just Buy One From Us™" "Your med school professor might ask you to get the test results in by Friday or you'll be expelled and will have to open up an outdoor Pawn shop so that your seven children and wife don't starve, but "All Alaska-you is to SAVE big by shopping with US"™

In my Creative Writing Seminar we are taught to begin each of our stories with a "hook," something to "grab the reader by the throat" (my instructor has the intensity and virility of a man one would expect to be conceived amidst a moonlit romantic encounter between John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, and Elvis Presley (modern Science has long-known how to combine the semen droplets from three separate men to produce a child via 'in vitro fertilization')).

In order to hone my craft, I shall re-begin the letter starting with a story told to me by Barrett during our coffee encounter five months ago. Please make believe (for the sake of my craft) in your reading of this letter, that that is how I began. I will also employ a "literary vocality" in order to accentuate the subtleties of my creative narrative, and to elevate it from genre as letter into the Holy Domain of literary fiction—in the event that I choose to submit our correspondence to The New Yorker for future publication.

Yours,

Dickly

*September fourteenth, Two-thousand-and
fourteen*

For my dearest Pop, my light amongst night, who'm' impregnates my thoughts with bliss and purpose, and who'm' without I would have been not;

The first encounter between Barrett and his wife and then ex-wife to be, Chandraileeniie, occurred in the median of a New York side-street, on the Bowery, where they had both been for the weekend (by will of their respective University departments) to attend Modern Cartography East, the largest Cartographical gathering in the Pacific Northeast during the month of November. Of course you are as familiar as I, with the excess of social interactions lacking intimacy that forget us the most important understanding: that those who pass us by, minute by minute, on our New York street corners, have lived lives with a number of memories, tragedies, experiences, and misfortunes equivalent to or even greater than our own. It behooves us to treat others with this quality of intimacy, with who'm' we share this human experience.

Unfortunately I have exceeded the length of the amount of paper that will fit into the mid-sized envelopes which enclose my thoughts and works. You will find the continuation of this story in my next letter.

Before I continue, please respond with an affirmation that you have read thus far, so that the tale is not spoiled for you.

Your ever-loving son, who'm' waits for your reply with the voracity of the

farmer in prayer for Fall rain,

Dickly

March fourteenth, Two-thousand-and-fifteen

For my Pop, my Father, my Sensei, my One,

I have given you exactly six months to affirm that you have received my tale—one month longer than is usual for your response. Since I have not received a call from the Alaska Cremation Center, located a modest five minutes from Dr. Peinstigg's 24/7 Pawn Lawn, (should you have even gone to redeem your postage in whittle form), I assume you are still alive and well and simply haven't the time to respond. I have chosen, then, to continue this story of Romance in this letter. (I have employed the capital 'R' to signify my employment of a 'literary privilege', a device used where the artist is permitted to bend the grammatical axioms of the English language in order to suit the extent requirements of linguistic expression). As you have done before, please make believe that my letter has begun in the following way and is an immediate continuation of my last letter—rather than as an auxiliary addition to a forthcoming published work.

Your Dearest Son,

Dickly

March fifteenth, Two-thousand-and-fifteen

For my Procreator, my Purveyor of Genes, my Essence,

I apologize that my last letter ended so abruptly, and without continuation of my tale of Romance. I have realized that in order to produce for you this story in its entirety, given its unexpectedly epic duration, that I would be required to purchase a large envelope so that I may ship the story in its completed form—for the Writer intends it to be read in one sitting. I have purchased such an envelope, and am thus able to continue the story. Again, as I have already informed you of the aesthetic importance of the “hook”, I must implore you to make believe that this letter begins not as it has, but with the story you will find completed below.

Yours,

Dickly

March fifteenth, Two-thousand-and-fifteen

For Dear Pop, my Hero and Heroine, whose strength births within this fairy-tale Life a reason for Living,

The first encounter between Barrett and his wife and then ex-wife to be, Chandraileeniie, occurred in the median of a New York side-street, on the Bowery, where they had both been for the weekend (by will of their respective University departments) to attend Modern Cartography East, the largest Cartographical gathering in the Pacific Northeast during the month of November. Of course you are as familiar as I, with the excess of social interactions lacking intimacy that forget us the most important understanding: that those who pass us by, minute by minute, on our New York street corners, have lived lives with a number of memories, tragedies, experiences, and misfortunes equivalent to or even greater than our own. It behooves us to treat others with this quality of intimacy, with who'm' we share this human experience.

When we give and receive directions, to lost strangers and to ourselves when we are lost, we should smile as we smile to our mothers. A smile not imposed by social practices, but of due thanks, for providing us company in our wanderings. But I digress.

At this very moment, on this side-street, Barrett received a picture message from his mother, Emma, (who'm' you haven't met but I implore you to meet, she knits the most pleasant decorative doilies' I've seen in my forty-five years) showing a rather comical pose their young Ferret assumed whilst napping on an antique

Gregorian vessel.

At the same moment, Chandraileeniie, (who'm' Barrett now calls his ex-wife, rather than by her name, Chandraileeniie) happened to receive a picture message from her brother, Ellmintin (who'm' her father also named after acquiring the ability of literacy, so Barrett has told me), showcasing a visage of Ellmintin submerged within a barrel of pickles above a humorous caption that read, "Stuck in a pickle".

With their cellulars lying gracefully upon their palms, palms infinitely poised with a Cartographic potentiality realized in the presence of a pen, paper, and uncharted terrain, the two both looked forward and exposed to each other the most honest expulsion of bliss. The smile.

It was this intimate glance that led them to their first date. Barrett proposed they break bread together the following evening. They spoke of their work, and found they were both in town for the same purpose, within the same career, of the same wants and dreams.

It went on like this for months, Dear Father, as Love in centrifuge does, spinning 'round and 'round until it transfigures into a gooey essence that one should wear protective gloves before touching. They birthed a child, and adopted a Chow Chow (who'm' I have mentioned in our first exchange). They moved to Montana, where it is often said the Hawks are innumerable—a detail which they inadvertently revealed to Chandraileeniie's father during a brunch where the two families met for the first time. Later they would come to regret the revealing of this detail. It alone created a great financial stress within the family, for upon hearing it,

Chandraileeniie's father assumed an insistence to join the family—he would build a cabin in which he would reinstate the Bird Butcher business of his former years. The business would fail to attract a singular customer during the three weeks in which it was open—and the cost of the operation, of acquiring and providing for the Hawks, would rob the couple of their life-savings and Montana home (such was their confidence as investors. If the Writer may propose a small comedic jab at the couple, of which I *implore* you to not reveal to Barrett in your communications—it would behoove the couple to spend more time mapping out their investments than they had their maps).

But out of this poverty, Father, raised another sort of Love, of whose nature wore a cloak of twine rather than silk, as their backs had so come accustomed to. And it was found that this cloak nurtured their tenderness more-so than the last, for when their riches departed, so did arrive the tragedies which the family overcame together. They hitchhiked across the country with their son, gaining faith from passersby by means of their noble Chow Chow—until they arrived at the very coffee shop in which I convened with Barrett only months ago.

After ordering two small coffees and a Venti Nutella Macchiatto's (the one luxury Chandraileeniie simply could not do without) they reminisced, picking up putting aside each of their memories in reverse-temporal order. Over the months of hitchhiking, over the months of their Montana home, over the hours spent through sunsets to sunrise perched by the telephone, speaking of modern Cartography and its state in academia. Back and back they traversed, until they arrived once more

upon that very median of that particular New York side street, my Father, and recalled themselves the memory which brought forth the present to who'm' they belonged.

"I couldn't imagine you had ever been so happy to see someone in your life," said Chandraileeniie to her husband, and reached her hand across the table to sheath his, like a knife dormant in leather embryo.

Barrett pressed the tips of his fingers to his forehead, and remembered, once more, the origins of that first smile.

"And I could not imagine you, my sweeniie, having ever been so happy to see someone, either," he replied.

And then Chandraileeniie recalled her smile. She thought. Her hand reproached and dug into the base of her Nutella Macchiatto, sending mounds of whipped cream through the top and along the side of the cup, and then onto the table—a patient avalanche of sugar. Tears welled in her eyes as she turned to look towards the window, as far from her beloved as her head might turn.

"I saw a picture of my brother in a barrel of pickles," she said. "There was a funny caption, one of the funniest things I have ever read—certainly the funniest caption I have ever read. But I can't remember what it said."

It was enough for Barrett, who had not planned on saying more on it, but felt compelled as he watched the Macchiattian whipped cream nestle from its slow-dive onto the faux-marble countertop.

“My mother sent me a picture of our Ferret on a Gregorian vessel,” he said.

He reached for her hand, and there it was not.

“Where’s Chow Chow?” said the son, whose first duty upon receiving the gift of speech was to name the noble creature.

They were divorced within minutes. It is known that a twill cloak cannot hold if the initial stitch recedes from its members. The nature in which Rome is built’ tis the nature in which it must fall, Scholars often say. And so they had. The soon-to-be-divorced couple looked under the table for the Chow Chow, but it was not found. It was assumed that the Chow Chow was stolen by an envious café-goer and left for dead in a tastefully decorated, but eternally uninhabited, living room in a three-bedroom apartment on the Upper East Side.

At the end of our luncheon, amidst a hug where the concentrated emotional weight between us was released violently in a masculine torrent enviable (I assume, of course) to passers-by, Barrett confided in me that he had received a call from the café owner the day after. The café owner informed him that the Chow Chow had been found breathless, but with impeccably groomed claws, on the floor of the café bathroom, its lyrics of its desperation etched deeply into the wooden door. He was told, in no uncertain terms, not to return again.

It is here that we must conclude our story, My Dearest Pop’op. For after a man has written, he must take time for his own.

If I have not moved you to communicate with your own semen-and-blood

with these words, then perhaps (before you depart from this world) you might at least send a picture of a wave or gesture—something so I may know that my words have been heard.

Your Beloved Son,

Dickly Heb

P.S. In your possession should still be an excess of six-dollars-and-ninety-seven cents (by the fruits of your only child's labor), which you are entitled to spend as you please, but should feel compelled to spend on a timely response in the form of a letter or charming note accompanying a basket containing an assortment of rare fruits and other edible delicacies.

No cards here

There was an infant in today's obituaries. I read it from over the shoulder of Geoff's paper outside of Murray's. We had been drinking in the company of Cardinelle and Eleanor. It could have been around four in the morning.

It went like this.

Harold, our dear. Now gone. His eyes that would have seen and did not, reminding us we can lose what we've yet to have. The world incurs our loss, what could have been but will not. In our thoughts he lives.

I can't recall ever seeing an infant in the obituaries. There isn't much to say about it—they're alive for a short time and then dead and mother and father are sad.

The four of us were involved outside Murray's, lodged conspicuously on the corner of Grand and Mulberry in the event that Emil should pass for a word with us on his content with the developments of his rosewater-finished leather utility satchels—an item indistinguishable and yet definitively more fashionable than the tool belt. The venture had come about as an unexpected consequence, even I hadn't guessed that a rousing discussion of forthcoming fashion trends for the coming year, during which Geoff proclaimed the item, "utility satchels" would serve as a catalyst for a surprisingly lucrative business among certain circles in Bushwick and then trickling into the Lower East Side. Rather than his usual conflagration of two dabs of Fernet washed with St. Germain, Geoff had taken to a simple craft lager. Eleanor and

I were intimately familiar with his afternoon habits (and by extension, so too was Cardinelle, their opinions and attire had yet to betray the notion of simultaneity that the birthing from their mother had perpetrated), and had suspected that the choice had been promulgated by the news of success following Geoff's predilection.

Not that there was an opportunity cost to be had in the finances of it, certainly not, but the declaration to a well-educated and tastefully endowed Claire who'd most certainly be sporting the belt at the next gathering on Friday's Thinktank (after six weeks of hourly meetings we had determined that the room's natural light was insufficient to sustain the ficus and that there would be need for a plastic replacement), the phrase "It's me whose responsible for your satchel" would do wonders as an aid for bedding. Without it, Geoff would have to look elsewhere for seduction, and though he'd been known to rise to the occasion, perhaps still felt best to keep his sensibilities sharp as to tow the odds in his favor. Hence the lager. Hence his sport coat, which I'd only seen him wear during openings in Chelsea and while travelling by air—two settings which could be met only with the most flattering attire, which he noted to me quite loudly in a Laguardia terminal, that "the stranger's impression was one that must be crafted entirely by fashionable means. One only gets to make impressions through conversations in cases where the meeting at hand isn't the last."

Since he had not been laid for a time, but had been close at the New Delhi gala, Geoff was forced to conclude that any future prospects would come only from the company of strangers. "My roots have been tapped," he would say, referring to his present acquaintances and the dying ficus.

A waiter arrived and said that something else would need to be purchased in order for a card to be used—a damning discrimination. Who can carry cash? To bother counting it all? Eleanor proposed we buy another cup each, and then, as a proclamation of the absurd contingency of the world—lob them into the concrete. It occurred to me that it was terribly funny that one could do this, that the human situation makes possible the satisfaction of each unpredictable desire. It's possible the waiter saw us encircle like schoolchildren through the window, our mugs in hand readied above the concrete. The rain was coming down and it was Thursday—No, Friday, since it was after midnight. One forgets what day it is, sometimes.

I could write an infant's obituary, I'm certain of it. Wouldn't need a picture.

A few blocks from home we stopped for a red light, my good company departed. For Eleanor, I gave a tightly squeezed hand, for I hadn't yet made up my mind whether to bed her or not and considered it best to keep my options open. For Cardinelle I offered a mere wave, an acknowledgement of our feud that had preempted the Thinktank from solving the cultural monstrosities poisoning the city, and thought it both altruistic and sporting of myself to offer such a hand at all. As for Geoff, there was hardly a gesture necessary, our companionship needed no particular goodbyes' to reaffirm our intimacy—our fellowship is everlasting.

A car passed unexpectedly close to the curb and soaked me. There was a black man standing across the street, I noticed, after the car pulled away. He wore a tank top and shorts, knee-high white socks and torn sneakers—an enviably muscular man, particularly in the shoulders. I have always envied the physique of troubled black men, always fit without having to try. I understand these things

aren't readily spoken of. But one thinks.

His jaw, additionally, was admirable. I could make it out clearly as he approached, crossing the street. It held his cheeks, one couldn't mistake about it, the arcs laid flush on his head's sides. He seemed not to mind his chest soaking wet in the rain. I remember, I thought, he may as well have removed his tank top. It did nothing in hiding his muscular chest, his collarbones. As he came closer I could make out his eyes. He made no motions to avoid the puddles in the inlets of the concrete.

He stopped in front of me to show me a knife he'd had in his pocket, then held it out between us.

"Are you tired?" I said to him.

He looked surprised, cocked his head.

"Where are you going?" I said.

His bicep had an absolutely striking quality when it held a knife. It flexed and tightened, his knuckles strained into the most magnificent peach reds, almost purples. His hand reached over my shoulder and removed my backpack. One feels small under a touch like that.

As he broke into a sprint returning towards the way he came, I took a moment for thought. Perhaps I was the only reason he'd been going this way. This considered, I'm often told to keep aware of these mistakes—most of the time we can't ourselves consider where we're going, and if then, how could another. I found myself running after him, gaining on the man, even—if such a thing can be believed. We don't credit ourselves for how fit we are, sometimes.

He ran down the steps into the train station, the six line on Spring. I followed and hopped the turnstile, entering the nearest car just as the subway was pulling away. There's a wind that passes you when you just nearly miss the train. It pulls on you if you're standing on the platform. My father calls it a gust—to me it's comforting. The car was empty. It's a lot to remember, that one minute it's Thursday and then the next it's Friday.

The train moved quickly and rocked slowly side to side against the rails. I walked towards the tail end of the locomotive, travelling through each car and seeing no one. The lights flickered on and off, this is what happens when the train comes in and out of contact with the third rail.

I read the advertisements along the upward interior of each car as I made my way through the train—a psychic named Theresa, a community college, YouTube. Stuck in front of a subway map in one car I found a piece of paper that advertised a church group that met on Sundays at eleven, one assumes eleven in the morning.

Through an oval window in the penultimate car, I could see him laying alone with my terrycloth backpack on the floor next to him. The train was heading uptown, and because it was an express there would only be two more stops to get off on before we entered Queens together.

He hadn't opened the bag, just lay there with his eyes closed, sprawled out on the seats. I wondered how far into Queens we would go together. I hadn't ever been to Queens and had lived in New York my whole life. I even considered telling him, just because it's funny. That's another thing, which New York you're from.

The train went above ground, crossing the Williamsburg Bridge. I could

make out individual drops falling from his neck onto the carriage floor in the moonlight. The door gave way and I entered the car. He was older, I realized, older than I. Twenties, thirties, forties, I've never been good at these sorts of things.

I remember smiling to myself, but I suppose at him since he was the only one there. I know how it must sound, incomprehensibly strange.

He awoke when I touched below his ear, above his neck. He rose immediately, standing in the middle of the car as it rocked side to side.

"It's bad," I said. And I'm not sure why.

"I know it is," I said.

He reached for the bag and sat across from me, taking it from the floor and placing it onto the seat next to him.

"You need it, I know," I said.

I could not change a tire on the car I'd never owned, never needed to own, but I knew where he was, where he was going.

"Let me take you for coffee, for a sandwich. It's almost morning."

We got off the subway at the second stop in Queens, at the Boulevard, and went into a small shop at a booth where a waitress placed two paper napkins between us and looked this backpack sat next to him.

"I'm wealthy," I said, then I ordered us tuna sandwiches.

"You should know. I'm certain you don't. It doesn't get better. If you were where I am, you would know."

I could tell he was listening, that I had said something to him.

"When you go home, and use it or sell it," and I motioned to the bag, "if you would just sit here where I am, you would know. It doesn't get better."

The sandwiches arrived. He tore at it with a captivating ugliness, finishing with full mouthfuls before I'd tucked the napkin into my thigh. I noticed a limping old man enter the diner; he sat at the table next to us. All he would need is a cane—a lucky fellow. He lit a cigarette and read a newspaper. I waited for the waitress or someone, to tell the old man to put it out, that this was a diner, that you don't smoke here. She came to us instead and picked up his empty plate.

"You're hungry, you're tired," I said.

"Another," I said to the waitress.

"You're worried about things. Like hunger, like exhaustion. But you can sleep, you can eat. And then?"

I took a cigarette from my shirt pocket and lit it. The waitress called from the counter.

"You can't smoke in here."

I pulled once and put it out on the table.

"I took the bus today," I said. "I don't have to, but I do. It does one good to see people. And I noticed the most peculiar thing today. I'm going to tell you about it because you should know. This bus driver ran every yellow light, squeezing us all into the next block. Think of that, how peculiar a thing it is for a bus driver to do, to chase the end of a circle."

"There's another thing, too, that you should hear. Standing next to me as I waited at the stop was an older woman who looked equipped to go abroad—almost

certainly homeless. I can tell these things. She sat in front of a young man and removed a hair brush from one of her purses."

He put his head down.

"What's your name? I'm going to tell you something."

The old man licked the ends of his thumb and forefinger and turned the page of a newspaper on the countertop.

"She turned to him, with the brush in her hand, and it was a clean brush, an absolutely immaculate brush. She took care of it. You'll have to trust me on this because I know these kinds of things. She turned to him said,

'Would it bother you if I brushed my hair?'

"I couldn't help but smile. How extraordinary it was, to be sitting there and to see it all happen right then. Right there in front of me."

I flicked his ear to make sure he was awake. He wasn't moving, you know—eyes closed and all, shoulders sagged. He rose and stared into the crumbs on the plate.

"I don't get to worry about those things, unkempt hair, hunger. You solve those things, and then there's just everything else. I'm telling you this, so it's important that you listen."

There was something in the crumbs.

"You don't want to trade those things for everything else," I said.

He nodded. I remember thinking that I understood.

The waitress collected his dish and replaced it with a tuna sandwich. He ate slower now. The old man put out his cigarette and lit another.

"You're thankful for your troubles," I said, and reached under the table for his thigh. It makes one remember, we were once just things, responding to hunger and desire, to thirst. Our actions articulated fears and then they were gone, we slept and then came the morning.

He stood from the table, and I stood to face him. My hand felt around his neck, it pulled him in close. I pursed my lips in waiting. The old man looked up from his paper, and then down.

We nearly touched until he pushed me aside, ran through me and out the door. I sat and began on a sandwich.

The waitress left the check on the table. I took the napkin from the floor and brushed it against my lips, removed the card from my wallet and placed it on the tabletop.

I'd forgotten what was in the bag, really, I had. I'd nearly forgotten even to take it from one side of the booth and place it on the other. The old man stood and hacked a deep dying cough.

I remember smiling, thinking of the ride home, the night train pulling up to the platform. It could be said of me tonight that something had been done—for one must do something, unless they decide to do nothing at all. The waitress came again and wiped the table.

"No cards," she said.

Remembering Pastorius

“Never before has there been a military operation so absurd, so incomprehensibly orchestrated, as Operation Pastorius—whose sole contribution to the human condition can be understood as a symbol of the incompetence which underlies those most unspeakable horrors uniquely demonstrable by the human race.”

- John Keegan, *“The Second World War”* (pg. 407)

Seven men stood in line beside a private George Dash on the grounds of the German High Command school, a mere hike from the capital city of Berlin. Each armed with a military-grade duffle bag full of various incendiaries, explosives, timed devices disguised as household appliances and tools, United States passports, \$175,200 in US currency between them, and a VHS copy of Shirley Temple’s *The Little Princess*. They were six civilians and two soldiers together, awaiting a final briefing from the seasoned Admiral Wilhelm Franz Canaris. It was now the end of the three weeks of intensive sabotage training, a summation of all relevant military preparation for the first covert intelligence operation into the United States. This included supervised instruction of manufacturing compact explosives, provisions of encyclopedic knowledge of various wilderness survival techniques, and an expansive cultural education of the United States (which partially explained, aside

from the Admiral's love of the film⁶, the inclusion of *The Little Princess*) as the soldiers were to be shipped at any moment.

"You all know, gentlemen, as one sometimes does when one is told, the importance of the Abwehr in the war against the allies," said the Admiral, who removed his cap as he said so and looked onward to each of the glimmering saboteurs.

"And it's for this reason that you've been chosen specifically, to venture first onto American soil, to lay the ground work for the The Final Solution."

With these few words, the Admiral donned his military hat once more, and struck an extended arm outwards (but slightly up as well, if one's to be honest about it) to the operatives.

The terms of the operation were described as follows: two divisions, each comprised of four men each, would set out on two Type VIIC U-202 submarines, one for Jacksonville, Florida, and the other to a quaint suburban extension of New York. The German army was to make its first presence of the War into the United States by means of an operation which Admiral Canaris had persuaded the Fuhrer to execute with exceptional ease, due to his reputation gained from a successful bombing of six New York factories during the first War.

The operation would tame the wildly optimistic American public, whose dedication to the allied War effort became increasingly problematic after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

⁶ On many nights the Admiral's dancing shadow could be observed on his quarters, owing to the candle-lit tent colored snow white he resided in, re-enacting *The Old Kent Road*, the title musical number from the film which he was known usually to describe as "incomparably optimistic" but at times instead used the term "angelic".

The attacks were planned as follows: hydroelectric plants at Niagara Falls, Illinois, Tennessee, and New York. A heavily trafficked railroad pass in Altoona, Pennsylvania, a cryolite plant in Philadelphia, a Hell Gate Bridge in New York, and the Pennsylvania Station of Newark, New Jersey (a station which, without German intervention, gave those who traveled through it the impression that it'd already incurred a firebombing or two).

The two teams were instructed to inspect the military equipment in the duffel bags, first the squad set for Jacksonville, who proceeded quickly and without question or error and immediately boarded their submarine, and second the squad set for New York—a most peculiar group comprised almost exclusively of German civilians, none of whom had received any military training aside from the three weeks of grooming under the Admiral, one of whom had been born in the US and had lived there well into his teenage years. These four brave saboteurs, George John Dasch, Ernst Burger, Richard Quirin, and Heinrich Harm Heinck, having witnessed the Jacksonville team board quickly and without reproach, didn't have the courage (this moment has since been cited by historians as the origin of the operation's fantastical reputation) to question the Admiral regarding the role *The Little Princess* would play on their voyage to the States.

All that was exchanged between the four men on this last occasion on German soil was a brief raising of the eyebrows as they glanced quickly at each other, in mutual bewilderment at the smiling young red head nestled atop a duffel of disguised explosives capable of dismantling a full convoy of armored transport

vehicles. Upon dismissal, they turned to their presiding officer, George John Dasch, and awaited an explanation.

George John Dasch, the most apparently distinguished of the four—a phenomenon which he hardly understood but presumed it due to his seniority in the group at age 39, had a tidy head of parted slicked black hair, and the three years of boy scouts training he'd received in the states before his mother had deemed the organization “shamelessly Jew-run”⁷. In addition, Dasch had attended numerous day care centers as a toddler in the States, where he'd devoted himself to the films of Chaplin during nap hour. To this day this presiding officer would still regale the tales to all who would listen, of his refusal to nap or to help himself to even a single tea sandwich during the snacking period, events which even at a young age he understood needed be scorned as procedures of “the herd”.

“All in due time, my comrades,” he said to the men.

With this, the saboteurs prepared their bags and boarded the submarine, where they made preliminary adjustments to the craft in preparation for the weeklong voyage to America.

Each found at their own station a file complete with all background information corresponding to their US passports. The first to examine his file was Private Burger⁸, who was deemed by the Admiral “most fit” to ensure the operating condition of all navigational systems as well as the mechanical integrity of the craft.

⁷ The occasion she was referring occurred during a weeklong Scouts trip to a lake-house in Schwerin, where during a daily excursion to the lake, one of the younger scouts had swum up from under a lily pad and momentarily sported it as a sort of fashionable hat.

⁸ Who had spent seventeen months himself in a Concentration Camp due to an unfortunate clerical error.

He found on his file, stamped in black ink, “Eleanor Burgstein”, the name corresponding to his fabricated US passport. So too did the other men, Dasch, Quirin, and Heinck, whose identities for the coming months would be only: George Dashberg, Dick Quirovitz, and Rachel Herschmangoldblatt, respectively.

“Captain,” said Heinck, who was desperately searching the sixty-page file searching for the pronoun *he*, “has there been some mistake?”

“Just the opposite, comrade,” replied Dasch, and as it was the first moment in which the thoroughness of the operation had come into question, he felt it necessary to ease the troops by reminding them of the infallibility of the Wehrmacht.

For the first time they stood together within the vessel, beside the control room complete with millions of dollars of engineering in the forms of switches, graphs, charts, levers, synthesized materials, and a perfectly rectangular metal desk on which assorted maps and papers with protractor sat awaiting diagrams from the crew members of the forthcoming expedition.

“Recall the valor required of our troops, recall the success of the great Operation Barbarossa. Recall the brave lives lost in our Italian neighbor’s victorious invasion of Greece. Recall the unprecedented expenses, both ideologically and of dollars, sucked thirstily from the nips of our citizen’s teat—the triumphant vision of our Fuhrer’s wonder weapons⁹. And now recall, finally, that we are at war with the United States—that we are the first to begin the great takeover. For each of us, there will some day be in the capitol city a statue in each of our names, composed

⁹ The crusade for “Wonder weapons” has since been called “a ghastly consequence of a military budget spent with the recklessness and hopeless illusory romances of midnight cabaret” by a German historian who has requested to be left anonymous named Stuart Delbraus.

just in the ways in which we have ordered,” so said Dasch. And by this time he had wondered precisely how his own statue would be configured. Optimally, he thought, it should be placed equidistantly between both a barracks and a library, a symbolic unity of the two modes of labor upon which he had based his life. Furthermore, to cement this symbol, it would be necessary that in one hand he held *Mein Kampf*, and in the other a Luger. Perhaps there would also be room for a small, but regrettably imaginary, pet that would lie perched at his feet. Perhaps a Yorkie, bravely sporting upturned ears—those signets of generations pure bred. Yes, yes, yes to all of these things, and some things more. Perhaps a film. Perhaps a show on the television.

Somewhere along the ruminations of George John Dasch, it became apparent to him that if there were to be a film, a television series at the very least, it would be essential that he make some contribution of his own to the field—and in order that the States brought nothing more than strife, if they were to be revealed at that beach one week away as enemy soldiers, that there should be some script on which to base his memory.

“Excuse me for a moment, gentlemen,” said the great Dasch, and thought more of this legacy on screen to-be after he’d locked the washroom door and begun a violent squeeze birthing a green-spotted turd nestled from within.

Heinck’s confusion regarding the state of his American identity had not been quelled in the least by the speech, though it had been moving nonetheless. Rather, the three were more confused now than ever about the nature of the plot. But never had the saboteurs been more imbued with the warmth of their nationalism, an

assurance that what was to come would be carried out without err. Heinck paced back and forth through the quarters of the submarine in the company of Burgstein and Quirovitz, (once called Burger and Quirin respectively) the soldiers were now under strict orders to communicate only in English and to address each other only by their acquired names and histories.

“Burgstein, Quirovitz, what have you made of your files?” he said quietly as he stood fixed in front of the quarter’s mirror, fastening his military-issued wavy blonde wig over the sides of his head for the first time.

“No need for us all to be Jews,” said Burgstein. “No reason at all. Not for that.” Ernest Peter Burger, now Eleanor Burgstein, had been the only man of the four to take a life during the War. On his face were three scars, one laid straight over the bridge of his nose, giving the impression that there was always a troubling stench nearby. A scent he was scouting for. The other two were laid evenly on each upper-cheek, something like exaggerated bags under the eyes made by sleepless nights.

“Been to New York, have you?” Said Quirovitz, who was now trying on his civilian wardrobe for the landing in Amagansett, composed of a pressed white-oxford and a pair of tweed pants patterned in scottish colors set waist high.

“Have not,” said Burgstein. He’d moved now over to the radio, checking systems and verifying the proper German channels as they departed from the bay.

“That’s who’s there these days, Admiral’s told me before,” said Quirovitz.

Herschmangoldblatt had by now pulled a small stool to the mirror. Sitting on a small desk next to him sat a small felt box which read “Top Secret”. He opened the

box and removed the two clip-on earrings it contained, placing each one carefully onto each earlobe, wincing slightly as he clipped them down on the ends. For a moment he looked deep into Rachel's blue eyes, blue eyes his own he remembered, and slightly pursed his lips.

Just then Daschberg came charging from the restroom.

"Enough, men. The preparations must be completed—we've set our course. Burgstein?" he said.

Burgstein nodded from the control panel.

"Off we go," said Daschberg.

He removed a cigarette case from his coat pocket and turned to Herschmangoldblatt, who was now fully undercover, with wig, earrings, a coat or two of creams to smoothen out a German-bred jaw line, and a tasteful flower-printed sundress with a slightly undersized pair of woolen sandals.

"You look nice, Rachel," he said.

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With forty eight hours left in the voyage to Amagansett, New York, and with all shipley duties and operations of preparation having been taken care of,¹⁰ the four

¹⁰ Quirovitz had toiled endlessly over the weapons systems of the U-202, ensuring an unprecedented 100% of systems successfully in operation. Burgstein had thus far navigated the charter without issue, leading the team Northwest out the Baltic Sea, crossing South-westward through the North Sea, following the coast of France South along the Bay of Biscay, and then redirecting abruptly due West across the North Atlantic. Herschmangoldblatt had herself taken the duties of the ship's cook, though the task was initially designated to Dashberg, preparing meals perhaps more elaborate than the ship's rations allowed, usually composed of four to five courses of Schnitzel, Spatzel, Bratwurst, Sauerbraten, and twice even a dish of Pea Croquettes, a traditional American meal intended to prepare the saboteurs pallets for the coming months of American cuisine. As of yet, she hadn't yet the courage to bring to

saboteurs found themselves both with a certain anxiety, three oversized barrels of Kölsch, and nothing left to eat.

The conversation came up naturally—the three soldiers had awoken at the leisurely hour of 1100 and sat together at an already-made table in the dining quarters of the craft while Rachel, who had now taken to the habit of generously applying a rouge lipstick at the end of each hour, scoured the hidden corners of the pantry for at least a can of Fleischkonserve, dubiously labeled “canned meat”, with no mention of any ingredients in particular.

“Perhaps you have wondered what it is, gentlemen, that I’ve busied myself with during the voyage,” said Dashberg, who now stripped a cloth napkin set beside him from the table top and tucked it neatly in between the ends of his collar.

In truth, Herschmangoldblatt was the only member of the crew who’d noticed the absence of the Captain. Quirovitz and Burgstein had spent the countless hours maintaining the course and viability of the submarine.

“Yes, yes, we have captain, just last night Burgstein and I spent the latter hours speculating on the nature of your isolation,” noted Quirovitz.

“I don’t recall this,” said Burgstein, whose fists held each a fork and a knife perpendicular to the table-top while he frequently turned his head to snatch a glimpse at the whereabouts in the kitchen. “In fact, I’m certain nothing was spoken of it, not once, not even a word.”

the captain’s attention that the food reserves of the vessel had been entirely depleted with still days left in the voyage. Dashberg himself had not left his quarters besides to eat and to rouse the spirits of his hard-working comrades. He had managed to pen a twenty-minute television pilot with outline during the trip, dedicated to himself, immortalizing the spirit of German camaraderie in wartime, set in a small New York apartment.

“All the same,” said Quirovitz, who was now drooling like a dog, “you must brief us.”

“I’ve fashioned the quintessential work of nationalism,” said Dashberg. “Composed of prose, of course, symbolizing our ideas and relationships—all those things praised by the *Werkstätige* who await the erect lap of the armed forces. It is for those common people that I have done this, so that their moral might stay the course of our Political Union.”

Quirovitz had quickly become attentive, even Herschmangoldblatt peered once into the room from the kitchen in her slightly undersized apron while she went through pretended motions of preparation for the day’s first meal. Burgstein had by this moment left the table with both fork and knife tight in fist, he was pouring full a pint glass of lager from one of the two remaining barrels and struggled to shrug his shoulders over the sides of his ears.

“It’s titled ‘Comrades’” said the captain, whose stomach now groaned but was immediately silenced by pride.

“It’s a tale of six friends in their twenties living in New York, trying to figure it all out,” he said, and continued, “a glass for each of us, Burgstein, if you please,”

“German friends, I suppose?” said Quirovitz.

Burgstein placed one glass in front of the captain and retreated back to the barrel to refill the rest for the collective. The captain George Dashberg smiled.

“One might expect, Quirovitz. But it’s not the case. Americans,” he said.

“Ah, then it is a satire,” said Quirovitz. “A group of loyal German soldiers playing the role of these American fellows.”

Dashberg took a sip from his Kölsch and a smile spread wide.

“It’s simply not the case, Quirovitz. I’ve written nothing of the sort. They are American civilians, nothing more. Monica, Joey, Chandler, Phoebe, Ross, and Rachel.”

Upon hearing her name being called, Herschmangoldblatt quickly made her way from the kitchen to the table just as Burgstein had finished laying down the crew’s lagers.

“One more for Rachel, Burgstein,” said Dashberg, and Burgstein rose once more from the table, teeth clenched, heading for the barrels.

Quirovitz stole a glance at Rachel, whose quivering lip made him curious as to some trouble she may’ve incurred, but didn’t think enough to mention it. He then turned to Dashberg.

“She’s never acted before, how could she speak to the German people?” he said.

Herschmangoldblatt’s quivering lip now vibrated. She had been excited, after all.

“It’s merely that the character’s name is Rachel, my comrade, I’ve made no plans for the beast to play the role. No, I’ve already made my mind on the actress who should play the role. A ‘Jennifer Aniston’ must play the part,” said the captain.

Burgstein had at last returned to the table with a lager of his own, and spit out a near mouthful after he’d heard the words.

"A Jennifer Aniston?" he said. "Nobody's heard of a 'Jennifer Aniston', there's never been a 'Jennifer Aniston'. You've become sick." The patriot Burgstein turned to his comrades, awaiting words of agreement.

"Perhaps you're right," said Dashberg. "I've never heard of a Jennifer Aniston."

"Now that it's been brought up, I cannot recall having heard of one either," said Quirovitz.

Rachel had never heard of one either, but thought it unladylike to disagree, and so remained silent.

After a moment of thought, Dashberg spoke up again.

"Perhaps now there isn't one, gentlemen, perhaps this much you've said has been accurate. But consider the day when one is born. Perhaps it will never come."

At this, Burgstein seemed able to collect his sanity, and the fork and knife from his clenched fists released once more to rest on the table.

"But perhaps it will," said Dashberg. Whereby Burgstein recouped his silverware in clenched fists.

"Perhaps it will be hundreds of years, thousands even. Perhaps it will only be twenty seven years, perhaps in February, on the 12th, no—11th, that one might be born."

"Why call it 'Comrades' then? If, of course, they are civilians," announced Quirovitz, who seemed taken with his observation.

"This I hadn't thought of," said Dashberg. "You've made a point."

Together the few sat in silence, Burgstein eyed Rachel, the poor woman who'd forgotten altogether to pretend to prepare the coming meal.

"What about 'Friends'?" mumbled Quirovitz. He ducked his head down. "To establish the civilian nature of their camaraderie, I suppose."

"Friends," said Dashberg. He rose and said it aloud, circling the table, repeating it to the ears of the saboteurs.

"Friends," he said. "Yes. Friends. Friends it shall be called. Friends. Of course. Friends." The captain grabbed the shoulders of the shaking Quirovitz, staying him, amicably staying him.

"You've done this country a great service," he said, and then looked once to his stomach. "Rachel, what have you prepared for breakfast?"

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The final day of the voyage presented the four with the regrettable inconvenience of being entirely without food. Herschmangoldblatt had continually reminded the crew that the human body was more than capable of spending three days without food, and pointed out that those members of the Great Camps had flourished quite well on a diet structured in this way. This point seemed not to satisfy the crew, even after Rachel confessed that the funniest joke's she'd heard had come from the prisoners of the camp—what was surely a sign of their jovial states of mind. She'd had a fondness for them, in fact, she admitted, and feigned that her mismanaging of the supplies had been intended, in order to improve the moral of the saboteurs on the last leg of the voyage. One's belly, even the heartiest of the

German bellies, can be sustained with the sustenance of laughter—this much was clear to Private Rachel¹¹.

And so the crew took to the drink, to the Kölsch, the life-blood. The four sat round the dining table in the main quarters, each sloppily quizzing the other on their back-stories. When errors were made, for instance when Dashberg had mistaken his identity as a farmer as that of a writer, they were left uncorrected.

After a few times round the table, the saboteurs had each decided to improve on the profiles they'd been assigned by the Admiral. The final identities committed to by the four were respectively thus, Dashberg the writer, Burgstein the carpenter, Quirovitz the carpenter, and Rachel Herschmangoldblatt the carpenter. Of the four, Burgstein had been the only one to forcefully articulate the absurdity of a crew such composed, but quickly changed his position after the last of the two barrels had been polished clean during a game of *Juden Raus!*¹² that lightened his mood

¹¹ She had still found it difficult to emulate the works of humor birthed by the malnourished prisoners of Auschwitz—her most sincere attempt resulted in a severe lashing from Eleanor Burgstein, who sported a timid erection while he worked her over.

¹² Published by Günther & Co. in 1936, the board game attracted a loyal, albeit cult, following among the Wehrmacht shortly after the establishment of the Nuremberg Laws. Involving a pair of dice, a game board, and a selection of pieces fitted with party hats (an admittedly lackadaisical parody of the Jew). The object of the game was simply to move the “Jews” to the various “collection points” on the board, where they would be deported to various undesirable locations on the globe. The winner was crowned once he (or she) had led a total of six (whether it should be this number was perhaps the most hotly contested issue in the Hasbro offices at the time, scholars have reasonably argued since that it has remained so) Jews to any of the “collection points”, at which point all the players of the game would announce: “Hurrah!” and together form a small circle with their faces pressed against each other for a lingering “group kiss” (*Gruppe Kuss*). An act not to be mistaken for homosexuality, for the SS explicitly outlawed preferences incompatible with the

considerably. Following the game, the team huddled together for one last viewing of *The Little Princess*.

“It is enough, then,” said Burgstein as the credits rolled. He then climbed the ladder towards the submarine’s hatch, and then once more since he’d fallen from the miserable ladder the first time. His proud words echoed to the united saboteurs, accompanied by a flood of light infiltrating through the open hatch:

“We have landed.”

It was not clear precisely what time it was, the timetables once memorized had been forgotten amongst the drunken stupors of the spies, but upon seeing the daylight sky and the sun raised looking down on the four, Dashberg bravely declared: “It is daytime, my comrades”.

Each of the four made their way, one by one, up the ladder and out onto American soil. The plan, to sport their German Navy uniforms (in order so that if they were to be captured they would be treated as POW’s rather than spies), had been entirely forgotten in their drunken vagrancies. Herschmangoldblatt proudly sported her tasteful flower-printed sundress, tucked neatly under her apron, and woolen sandals. Quirovitz wore his pressed white-oxford shirt and tweed pants, which were admittedly more fit for a businessman than a carpenter, and Burgstein had followed suit with Quirovitz, wearing an outfit matching. Captain George John Dashberg rose last from the hatch, whose ascendance from the ladder’s end was observed from the loyal three who watched from the beaches shore. He sported an

“German norm”—illustrated by its successful arrests and persecutions of a total of 100,000 homosexuals between the years of 1933 and 1945.

elegant lace napkin colored pink which just barely fit when tied round his neck, and under it was worn a cardigan vest atop a cotton white T-shirt.

Rachel could not help but blush at the sight. The lager had made its rounds.

One by one a dazed Captain threw to each of his wobbling three the duffel bags they'd been given by the Admiral, in which contained the supplies necessary for the operation's completion. Into the sand went the incendiaries, explosives, timed devices disguised as household appliances and tools, United States passports, and a VHS copy of Shirley Temple's *The Little Princess*.

Burgstein kept watch. The Amagansett shoreline spread without foliage for miles on each end, creating the impossible task of watching both directions simultaneously. While Quirovitz dug through the sand, and Herschmangoldblatt laid each of the bags safely buried in, Burgstein span slowly, a method of surveillance inspired by a lighthouse he'd once seen as a boy. Atop the buried pile, Captain Dashberg removed the work he'd birthed in a voyage's time, his 'Friends', and laid it rest—with all but one item on his person. The outline. He could hear in this moment the growls of the Admiral Canaris, but he left the evidence on him—the last link between the saboteur four and the Fatherland—this and the \$175,200 in US currency that Dashberg had stashed under a slumbering Herschmangoldblatt.

It must have been a curious sight for John C. Cullen. These four beachgoers, one rotating slowly like the last beats of a tranquilized dreidel, one struggling with a pink lace tied onto his neck that'd blown over his eyes, and the other two collapsed into the sand laying in full clothes unfit for the beach. This Coast Guardsman thought to radio the station, but instead began a more candid approach, walking

casually through a small grouping of bushes towards the scene on the morning of June 12th, 1942.

Had Burgstein not been spinning, perhaps he would have not been knocked to the beach floor from dizziness. Perhaps, had he not been spinning, he would have seen the approaching Coast Guardsman and made the appropriate notice to the outfit. As it was, the brave Dashberg was the first to spot the man, due to a rare instance of humility whereby he decided his pink lace might be better suited in his pocket. He walked slowly, with each step struggling to regain his composure against an uneven lay of sand. It occurred to him that the appropriate greeting would most certainly be a handshake, as he had seen in the American film distributed to the crew. All assurances that were felt by the Captain were combated by the inebriated thought: at what point should he raise his arm to shake the hand? For fear of raising it too late and arousing suspicion, George Dashberg crooked his forearm upwards at forty-five degrees, waiting to catch the hand of the Guardsman like a pitch as he approached from ten yards out.

“My friend,” said George Dashberg, locking his hand stuffed with \$260 into the Guardsman’s¹³.

“You have seen nothing here—nothing at all,” and proudly the Captain Dashberg called to his troops, who were awoken by Quirovitz and quickly followed the captain from the beach, en route to the Long Island Railroad, where they would board a train for New York City.

¹³ During a later interrogation by the FBI, John C. Cullen revealed that a generous portion of the 260 dollars had been blown from George John Dasch’s hand out to sea.

The three-hour journey from Amagansett station into Manhattan had provided an opportunity for the saboteurs to recompose themselves, and after a long slumber had by each of them, they found themselves readied, standing amidst the grandeur of a bustling lunch hour at Grand Central Terminal. It was also at this time that the superiors whom Cullen had contacted arrived, fully armed, to the beach site where he'd seen the four men. Within minutes, all of the buried equipment had been found and confiscated—including a notably amateurish three-act script.

In the next hour, by the time the four had checked into the luxurious Biltmore Hotel at 335 Madison Avenue, the Coast Guard had already alerted President Roosevelt and the FBI of the buried equipment. A manhunt had been ordered, for four unarmed troops of German origin, whose whereabouts were unknown.

Captain Dashberg had ordered two rooms in the hotel, one for himself and Burgstein, and the other for the remaining saboteurs. After a brief nap, which Dashberg assured the unit was “as essential to the charge as the moment of the Hell Gate Bridges’ detonation”, the four rushed into the hotel bar, where they spent most of an hour stuffing themselves with all edibles available. Herschmangoldblatt had hiked her dress above her stomach following the meal, revealing a nest of coarse black hairs and a bulging torso, which Burgstein made a disappointed note of.

The well-fed men took a moment to survey the surroundings of the bar. The impossibly high ceilings with weight distributed by an array of wooden columns finished to shine, various portraits of bulbous white men wearing mustaches, all

possessing their own small lamps atop (for the hard of seeing, noted Dashberg). Lastly they noticed the women, who were paired in small chattering tables spaced generously throughout the room, and were laughing with chins raised and weighted cocktail glasses held between thumb and forefinger. Most of all who noticed their presence was dear Rachel, who could not move herself to watch it all, and so tucked herself back under her dress and twiddled a curl by her ear before reaching to wipe away a burgeoning tear.

The excitement inspired in Dashberg by Rachel's bulging stomach began to worry him. It had been weeks on the U-202. He excused himself quietly from the table, leaving behind his drink and the stunned gentlemen. Something was on the mind, a line, a word he'd woven into the script for a situation just as this. It was this that he let roll silently from his throat, smoothing out each syllable off his lips, crashing his tongue back and forth against his teeth. He was closing in on her, the flailing mouth of the captain, a distinguished vision of not yet forty, warmly lit like gold under a desk lamp perched on the bar's end—nearly premiering this introduction, a line.

He reached his elbow out, making contact with the bar-top's edge, leaning his weight onto his fists.

"Come here often?" he said to this beauty. It was the first time the phrase had been uttered, this moment it's inception in the American lexicon, regaled with a myth of its own, the gravity arguably superseding the trials of the saboteurs.

"No," she said, and turned farther from the captain than he'd thought one could go.

Even in the first usage it was no good.

This moment presented Captain Dashberg the rare opportunity to reflect, to tailor his behavior to the circumstances, to reveal himself as a fellow tailored to evolve. He circled round her stool, setting himself face-to-face with the beauty.

“Come here often?” he said once more.

From her side the maiden retrieved her hand and let it run quick across his cheek. Without delay, she returned once more to a posture facing in the opposite direction.

The three saboteurs were watching from the table now. A once more fists-clenched Burgstein, a sobbing Herschmangoldblatt, and a hopeful Quirovitz, brimming over at the Dashberg, with eyes desperately waiting for the deal to be done.

It's imperative that a Captain understand when a moment of such gravity is about, parsing slowly through moments where the troops must be rallied. Each click of a trigger, detonation of a bomb, each airstrike, or port domination, every victory of War is carried out by a respectful grunt, whether to flank or ride eastward and charge head on—regardless of what is ordered, the grunt must take to his Captain's orders with whole heart. In this way, all wartime heroisms are preceded by a nurturing of the relationship between soldier and captain. This Dashberg knew. He thought of the Admiral Canaris, who in his own crossroads successfully sabotaged the French installations in Morocco during the first World War.

The war was to be won or lost right then and there, in this very moment.

So be it then. It had been decided.

“I’m a secret agent,” said Dashberg.

And to this she perked up, showing him the insides of her forearms, even her cheeks turned a cherry red.

Quirovitz uncovered his hands from his face, and replacing the expression was one of pride. Dashberg looked to the table, making known by glance the Wehrmacht victory. Then applause from the three. She touched his forearm, and it all came out. He took her drink in hand, downed it, and twice more did the same to two other elderly patrons who seemed not to notice, then rose to a standing posture on top of the bar stool.

“I’m a secret agent,” he yelled. “Sent by the Fuhrer’s personal command.”

Burgstein was first of the three whose ears the remark seemed to register. He rushed to the standing Dashberg, throwing him from the stool to over his shoulder, and signaling the remaining outfit, walked stone-faced to the hotel elevators.

The laughter began with a small cackle, a huff even, a small cough often caused by a shaved walnut lodged in a throat. Then it grew, extending outwards, both in volume and ferocity—laughter gone applause.

“I’m the pride of the Wehrmact,” yelled the Captain to the room from Burgstein’s shoulders as Quirovitz struggled to close the parlor doors behind them.

In the offices of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the belongings gathered from the beach had now been sorted, individually tagged, and stored indefinitely.

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The following morning Captain Dashberg awoke to an already roused Burgstein, who stood by the hotel room window finishing a cigarette.

“I’ve thought about this, Burgstein, this vocation of ours,” he said, and truly was thinking only of his American script and the woman he’d met the night before.

“You and I are going to have a talk,” he said. “And if we disagree, only one of us will walk out that door—the other will fly out the window.”

Burgstein turned from the window to face the captain, readying his hand along the grip of his weapon still holstered.

“I won’t go through with the mission,” said Dashberg.

“Leave the factories at Niagara Falls, let Illinois be. Forget the railroad pass in Pennsylvania, forget about Philadelphia, forget about the bridge—forget Pennsylvania Station. Let it all remain,” he continued.

Burgstein popped the holster open and sat on the bed next to Dashberg. In his hand he felt for the grip at his waist, then slowly removed it from its leather casing.

“They said it was a clerical error¹⁴, one wonders after seventeen months,” said Burgstein, who turned to the window, then fired three rounds into the glass.

“What is it then, Dasch?” said Burger, and by addressing him with his proper surname had earned the confidence of the Captain.

“First business, we alert the FBI. Keep Quirin and Heinck out of it, out of it all.” He laid the remaining \$174,589 into a suitcase and headed for the door.

¹⁴ It truly was. The SS had provided a rather large fruit basket to make amends, shipping it directly to Burgstein’s home. They had even included a rather sweet note of apology directed to his wife, who’d long left the home and moved into another with a man she’d met during the time spent in the camp.

“Yes sir,” said Burger, and as Dasch took his final steps from the hotel room into the hallway, he realized he’d never heard these words before.

On this morning of June 13th, 1942, Captain George John Dasch made his way in plainclothes out the Biltmore hotel onto a Manhattan sidewalk, where he stopped an older gentleman in order to inquire about how he might reach J. Edgar Hoover.

The first attempt had failed, the older man hadn’t known, or hadn’t wished to tell him, thought Dasch—perhaps the infiltration had already broken in the news. And so he took to a small delicatessen, where after conversing politely with an older Indian gentleman and purchasing a bag of M&M’s using one bill he presented from the opened suitcase, he flipped through the yellow pages to F.

Moments later he was on the street, searching for a payphone, with the number in his hand and an outline of a television script in his jacket pocket. He traveled a few blocks south down Madison Avenue, where George John found a telephone and an old reading room where pasted onto the window was a print of an old German poet, the most notable poet of German origin, who himself had traveled to Pennsylvania, bridging culturally the two nationalities Dasch found himself amidst in opposition. A Francis Daniel Pastorius.

He rang the number.

“I would like to speak with J. Edgar Hoover, please,” said Dasch, to a stunned assistant who inquired ‘why’.

Dasch carried on an explanation, leaving out no details. Every moment of the plan was elaborated, from the three-weeks training, to the submarine voyage, to the deposited goods on the beach, and their brief stay at the Baltimore hotel where

Dasch had successfully courted a striking American woman. When the tale had been told, when Dasch took his first break, awaiting a response, the voice spoke.

“Who is calling?” it said.

“My name is Captain Pastorius,” said Dasch. The line went dead.

“So be it,” he said, and made his way back to Grand Central Terminal once more to board a train to Washington, D.C. The trip would at least give him ample time to settle the small grievances he’d had with his second act break of the script.

He found himself stuffed in coach between a girl-scouts troop, all giggling in pig-tails and wrestling with their forest green high socks.

“Perhaps Ross’ ex-wife will be a lesbian,” he said to himself, and scribbled dutifully on the outline while the scoutmaster looked ferociously on him.

The train ride had proved productive indeed. Various dilemmas and relationships in the outline were revised in a way that seemed inevitable to the captain. Like all great art, the script gave the impression of a work discovered by man, rather than created. These musings followed him out the train station, into a taxi, where he uttered the words, “FBI, please”, and then found himself standing in front of the heart of American security, with a suitcase containing 174,580 US dollars.

Though large, the building was rather unimpressive. A stately rectangular brick building with square windows lining each side in calculated increments. Overall, aside from perhaps a respectable vehicle or two sat outside, the offices were indubitably a product of unimaginative bureaucracy. The Captain had expected

something more, perhaps a rounded chimney, an arched doorway—something lively, tasteful even. It was nothing to call to Hitler about.

In the lobby of the building, George John Dasch came face-to-face with a secretary who was begged to summon The Director regarding a matter that could very well change the course of the War. Perhaps it had been the suitcase Dasch had propped up onto the desktop, or the way he'd whispered his request for Hoover. For a certain reason, the secretary had made a move and the security had been summoned from the mailroom, where the assistant director, D.M. Ladd, overheard the announcement and had become quite curious about the gentleman. And so when the security team reached the lobby, after picking up Captain Dasch by his arms and throwing him into a small interrogation room where they closed in behind him, it was because of D.M. Ladd that he was not stripped naked right then.

It was not because D.M. Ladd had gotten word from Roosevelt regarding the equipment¹⁵ found on the beach in Amagansett. At this time in the agency's history, Ladd had proved to be a potential replacement for Hoover as Director, and as a result each solved case could mean another year in power for the one who'd succeeded, interdepartmental communication could too often gift the benefits of one's work to another, and, even worse, contribute to thwarting a crime.

For these reasons, D.M. Ladd had rescued Captain George John Dasch and had allowed him a seat across from him.

Dasch began slowly, "My name is Pastorius," he said.

¹⁵ Including electric blasting caps, pen and pencil delay mechanisms, ampoules of acid, various detonators, *The Little Princess*, and a script described by Roosevelt as "remarkably average".

Ladd clicked closed the ball on the tip of his pen, shut his notebook, deposited both into his pockets, and leaned his shoulders forward with his fingers intertwined on the interrogation table. Dasch recounted the three weeks training, the Florida and Amagansett teams, the back stories, even citing the schematics and layout of the U-202 that could be found half a mile from the Amagansett shore, leaving (and at times overstating) each detail unturned before concluding with the phrase, “a permanent extinguishing of the spirit of the American public.”

Ladd thought of his dinner plans with the board of the FBI, he imagined himself repeating the story he’d been told, citing each particular detail, and could already hear the menacing laughter of a bloated red-faced J. Edgar Hoover. Nothing about the plot seemed plausible. He questioned Dasch about the Abwehr’s decision to send eight vaguely trained soldiers on an operation of such gravity, two of which were American citizens, and another who’d been imprisoned in a concentration camp for seventeen months. He questioned further the decision to falsify female papers for a German soldier who was clearly a man, and finally criticized the recklessness of the decision Dasch had made himself to announce to the patrons of the Baltimore hotel that he was indeed a secret agent, something which seemed to fundamentally miss the point, so far as Ladd was concerned, of what it meant to *be* a secret agent. In summation, Ladd stood from the desk, and made his way from the room, where the details of the operation would be left for good.

It was then that Dasch sprung for the suitcase sat next to him, and quite casually opened it face down onto the table, pouring a piling sum of American currency out into an undeniably impressive mound.

The gesture was enough to bring Ladd back to his seat. He considered, for the first time, the fantastical stories from picture books he'd read as a child, and wondered too whether there had been truth there, as extractable historical tales. The shock had passed, and Ladd asked the question of a man forced to confront the absurdity of military operations.

"What is it for, then?" he said, and flipped through a stack of bills as inspection.

"Military operations, of course," said Dasch. "Any needs which we had, those of survival and those of sabotage."

The Assistant Director locked the door.

"But now, as I sit here, I must confess," continued Dasch, "that I've other plans for the money," and fingered in his coat the outline he'd been preparing, "for more noble purposes."

One wonders what the face of an Assistant Director looks like when its been delivered a such a victory, arriving without any preceding investigation. It resembles most a pig-faced lottery winner, whose stumbled upon a scratched-off ticket in an old dumpster, where the numbers are clearly visible and repeated by a television next to the ticket which has only just announced the conclusion of the drawing.

D.M Ladd collected the Captain turned saboteur. In a matter of days, the four saboteurs of Amagansett and their compatriots of Jacksonville were assembled into individual cells, each heavily guarded in their respective states. The conviction

came quickly, death by chair for the members, thirty years imprisoned for the bravest who came forth.

During the trials taken to military tribunal, George John Dasch saw for one last moment his saboteurs, a Heinrich Harm Heinck whose face was still adorned with a powder that had a pleasant rounding effect on his jaw line. A Ernst Burger, seeming resilient to his fate, taking to it with fervor—with a soldier's poise. Then Richard Quirin, who couldn't be convinced that this moment would be the last together of the saboteurs. No speeches were made, no oaths were taken, there was nothing like a glorified trial by the public. There would be no fame, no lunchtime whisperings and cackles by day laborers over tin lunchboxes of ham sandwiches.

Somewhere in a suburban New York town evidence room, a coastguardsman on his ninth hour of watch took into his lap a stack of pages, leafing through a work with mild bemusement and occasionally shame when a boorish line struck laughter, a script whose cover simply read: "Friends".